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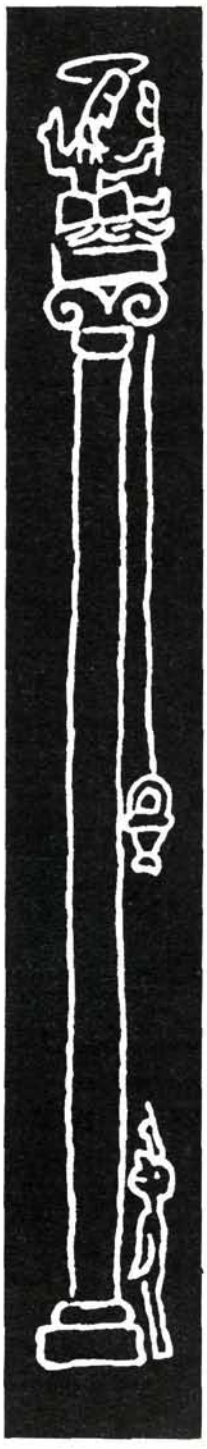

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CORRESPONDENCE

Carrying on

Brooklyn, N.Y.

To the Editors: Tom Vogel Jr.'s article on Peru [January 25] leaves the unfortunate and mistaken impression that upon the violent murder of Mother Augustina Rios Lopez by the Shining Path the religious community of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd abandoned the people of La Florida. Though the sisters left the area temporarily because the people themselves fled from the violence, the sisters are committed to their people and, in the words of Sister Mary Delia Rodriquez, provincial superior, "In no way are we going to abandon [the people] since we are identified with the work of the Good Shepherd."

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd evangelize throughout the globe in many areas of political conflict: Central America, the Philippines, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, South Africa; they have survived political repression in such countries as Hungary; they are present to the poor in many blighted first-world urban and rural areas. I trust this will set the record straight.

SISTER CLARE NOLAN

Ask his name

Berkeley, Calif.

To the Editors: John Garvey's essay "Do You Know Jesus?" [January 25] put me in mind of a story told by John Savard, a young Jesuit with whom I visited in El Salvador in November for the commemoration of the massacre of the martyrs of the Central American University.

During our visit we accompanied a group of peasants as they tried to repatriate the village they had abandoned in 1982 because of the fighting. Since depopulating the countryside is a main tenet of low-intensity warfare, the army tried to stop the villagers; at one point a soldier began beating an old man who was part of the group. A number of the North Americans surrounded the man and eventually got him out of harm's way.

Later, as John sat in the back of his truck with friends, he saw the same old man walking past and called him over to meet the group. Asked his name, the man replied, "*Me llamo Jésus.*"

At that point, John said, he realized why he had come to El Salvador: He had come to meet Jesus. Listening to him describe the incident to a group of students at the Jesuit School of Theology, it struck me that what he said was true of all of us. Like the Magi, we had come to meet Jesus and bring him the gift of our solidarity.

REV. T. MICHAEL McNULTY, S.J.

Catholic manners

Syracuse, N.Y.

To the Editors: I wholeheartedly concur in Ms. McCarthy's desire to mend our Catholic manners [January 25] and in her admiration for Sir Thomas Browne's civility and moderation. We desperately need more of the courtesy evident in his writing.

Yet I must admit I found an appalling lack of courtesy in her seconding of Vernon Ruland's characterization of Newman and Waugh's criticisms of Anglicanism as "neurotic hankering." In my lexicon the word *neurotic*, unless used as a clinical diagnosis, is an insult, plain and simple.

I find the discourtesy in Catholicism centers more on a "left/right" divide than on the lay/clerical divide, and this discourtesy seems to affect all Christian churches, even the Episcopalians. The Right has an embarrassing tendency to label its opponents as "disobedient" or "heretical," while the Left seems to manage to be even more patronizing by psychoanalyzing any substance out of the Right by such labels as "neurotic" or "patriarchal." Thus insults replace what we all need, discussion, and, failing agreement, understanding.

Understanding is possible only when we all realize one thing, that our opponents all truly have the best interests of the church at heart. Agreement may be impossible over some issues, but disagreement does not necessarily mean disrespect or discourtesy. If we only seek to *understand*—which is by its very nature an act of love, respect, and courtesy—perhaps we can avoid censorious anathemas and patronizing psychoanalyses on all sides.

REV. ROBERT HYDE

Moral dimensions

Phoenix, Ariz.

To the Editors: I want to commend Daniel Callahan for his insightful article, "An Ethical Challenge to Prochoice Advocates" [November 23, 1990]. While I write only

(Continued on page 174)

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COMMONWEAL

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Managing the peace

The Soviet peace initiative never had a chance. Neither did George Bush's last minute ultimatum. Politics by other means: the war machine ground on—and rather swiftly—to remove Iraq from Kuwait. It will appear in retrospect that war was a foregone conclusion once U.S. troops landed in Saudi Arabia last August. But its momentum could have been halted at any moment, including Saturday, February 23, had Saddam Hussein left Kuwait. He did not. In the days following, Iraqi soldiers, exiting via Saudi Arabia as enemy-prisoners-of-war, showed greater prudence than their commander-in-chief. In the face of defeat, Hussein's calls for withdrawal only raised the specter of an ambiguous outcome. Better a clear-cut victory than more of his flamboyant war making and heedless intransigence.

Low casualties among the coalition armies and a rapid return of U.S. troops will contribute to popular opinion that President Bush has done the right thing. From that perspective he has been masterful in building and holding together an unlikely coalition and in responding to and rejecting Gorbachev's efforts to negotiate an unsatisfactory settlement. Bush has chosen capable people to carry out his policies, diplomatic and military, and has had the good sense to let them do their jobs. Even Saddam Hussein, in adopting every worst-case strategy, played his part.

But it is the pursuit of peace to which the administration must now turn. Will it be as skillful in peacemaking as in war making? Military goals have a clarity that more ambiguous political and diplomatic goals almost always lack. That is why, as in the present case, political and diplomatic failures led to war and why, as we come to the end of it, choosing for the longer term requires more than good organization and management. Something like "the vision thing," if only in modest amounts, is called for.

Is the administration able to persist in peace as in war—in maintaining a consensus and coalition for stability in the Middle East, for arms control in the region, and for a settlement of the Palestinian issue? The current disarray in Panama suggests that U.S. interest wanes when the fireworks cease. But that is a posture—if conscious and thought through—that might be productive in the Middle East. The United States ought to step back and not appear too central to a settlement that first of all involves Iraq and Kuwait, and then the other Arab coalition members, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Syria, and finally Turkey and Iran. Recriminations between Kuwait and Iraq will be fierce; mediation by Arab and Islamic countries is likely to be more productive than that of the Western nations.

Still the U.S. needs a coherent policy and a set of goals. Most immediately these should focus on support for a regional peace-keeping force, perhaps built around Egyptian divisions now in Kuwait and acting under the auspices of the Arab League and the United Nations. U.S. withdrawal should be immediate, and our naval forces

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rapidly reduced to their prewar numbers. Enforceable agreements on reducing the levels of offensive weaponry are vital in a region torn by conflict. Here the UN Security Council can have a major role in restraining those permanent members, the U.S., the Soviet Union, France, and China, whose weapon sales have contributed so lavishly to the carnage. Finally, there will be no real chance for long-term peace in the Middle East unless the Palestinian issue is resolved.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict should not be linked to the Iraqi-Kuwaiti one; yet it is clear that as long as the Palestinians have no permanent home and the Israelis no formal recognition by their neighbors, their multiple grievances will provide endless opportunities for conflict. About this, Israel perforce will have the final say, but the United States should not step back and wait. The Israelis have never been so vulnerable—and felt so—as over the past seven weeks. The Scud missile attacks have confirmed to them and finally made clear to the rest of the world the exceedingly short warning time they have to respond to air attack. Their restraint in the face of such attacks was admirable. It was also very much in their self-interest, and it is to this self-interest that appeal should now be made. Perhaps there has never been a better chance for Israel to resolve the Palestinian question than now. And it may be the last opportunity for the Palestinians to assure themselves a territory.

The United States and Egypt should press their Arab coalition partners to meet with Israel and begin a process that will lead to the recognition of Israel, to a guarantee of its borders and security, and to an end of Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. It is time for the United States to call in its chips with Israel and help resolve this unending source of conflict.

Perhaps the greatest danger to peace over the long term is our own national predilection for settling the world's problems unilaterally and militarily. While U.S. casualties have been minimal, the scenes we have yet to see from Iran and Kuwait should rein in our hubris. Just as our abiding prosperity blinds us to dire poverty and despair in our own cities, our seeming immunity from violence encourages a dangerous sense of invulnerabilty and moral triumphalism in our foreign adventures. We cannot continue on these paths. That is the challenge of peace making.

Production Editor: *Commonweal* seeks a new production editor to begin work in early April. The position requires hands-on knowledge of magazine production and lay-out. The production editor is responsible for dummying each issue, selecting illustrations, placing advertisements, and other production details. He or she works directly with the editors, typesetters, and printers on all details involving production and copy preparation. The production editor should be creative, self-motivated, organized, flexible, and able to handle details under deadline. Word processing and computer experience necessary. Four-day work week. Full benefits. Please send a cover letter, resumé, and samples to the Editor, *Commonweal*, 15 Dutch St., New York, N.Y. 10038.

THE GULF WAR

A NO-HANDS-TIED WAR

NEITHER JUST NOR RIGHT

Despite all the talk about this being a just war—never has a president inclined his head so often to the moralists—the Gulf war is really nothing less than war the old-fashioned way. It is being waged without real or final restraints, and it is being carried by its own momentum. As such, it is neither just nor right.

There was, without doubt, *justification* for this war. As authorized by the UN, it was intended to liberate Kuwait and to restrain a tyrant. Noble goals. Necessary goals. But as in the Agincourt battle scene in Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V*, once begun, everything becomes mud, confusion, and blood. For as it happens, this is not simply a war about forcing Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. It is a war about oil, about Western hegemony in the "new world order," about establishing the preeminence and staggering power of technological weaponry, and, at bottom, about a weakened U.S. regaining its sense of self-confidence.

- Waged without restraints. "This will be no Vietnam." "We will not have one hand tied behind our backs like last time." "No price is too heavy to pay to reverse the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait." In sum, this is the Bush policy on proportionality. It forswears the use of *nothing*: gas, germs, nuclear weapons. If need be, this war will be prosecuted with the *full extent* of American power. We have it on the president's word. Anyone who believes otherwise is naive. The only constraint—are you listening, bishops?—is not morality but public opinion. And to govern and direct that, all information on the war has been skillfully tailored to maintain public support at home. When events—such as the Ash Wednesday shelter/bunker bombing in Baghdad—or CNN updates have intruded, thereby threatening to raise questions about the war's conduct or progress, the government has worked assiduously to contain the damage. Only high-ranking officers and defense department officials release news on this war, it seems, presenting their information in sanitized video packages and with abstract terminology (killed is "KIA," war is "storm").
- Carried by its own momentum. Billed as a war to liberate Kuwait, the purpose of the Gulf war has devolved to the ouster of Saddam Hussein and the crushing of Iraq's military capability. The Iraqi despoliation of Kuwait, its firing at Saudi and Israeli cities, and its fouling of the Gulf's waters have been mirrored by the coalition's bombardment of Iraqi cities, the contamination of water and sewer lines, and the destruction of hospitals, schools, bridges, trucks. Eye has not yet seen nor ear heard the full extent of the devastation. And as in Vietnam, the American public prob-

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ably never will learn of it all. The conduct of the war has rendered the initial UN terms of engagement null. We have made waste of Iraq to save Kuwait. And the overriding concern has become only that we win, convincingly; that we come out of it with rewards richer than the liberation of Kuwait; that the war not end with anyone anywhere questioning America's resolve in the immediate future. As Mr. Bush told a convention of religious broadcasters last month, defending this war as just: "When this war is over, *the U.S., its credibility and its reliability restored*, will have a leadership role in helping to bring peace to the rest of the Middle East."

If today the United States can claim less and less economic muscle, we have proved without a doubt that we can still make war. The logistical accomplishments in the Gulf mobilization were unprecedented, and the technical achievements rivaled those of any war-making undertaking in history. Perhaps to provide some of the latter with a more human touch, last month Dick Cheney and Colin Powell autographed a pair of GBU-27 bombs while at a Stealth fighter bomber base in Saudi Arabia. GBU-27s are two-thousand-pound bombs which are able to penetrate more than six feet of reinforced concrete. Several days after the signing party, Stealth bombers from the same base attacked the bunker/shelter in Baghdad. Over three hundred people died. According to eyewitness accounts, the GBU-27s "cut through the building like butter."

The lesson of the Gulf war is now indeed clear: America has been preparing for war for a generation and we can do the job. With little loss of American blood (held to "acceptable levels"), we can strike almost anywhere in the world, massively and convincingly. The political and psychological implications are immense, and, for some, reassuring.

These words are not written to in any way to justify appeasement or to acquiesce in the arrogance of aggressors. But they imply that in our impatience—in our abandonment of effective, sustainable, and proportionate sanctions—we made a fundamental error, an error that will have geopolitical and moral ramifications for generations to come. In Iraq, over half the population is below the age of fifteen. They will not forget the deadly cost of our smart bombs and surgical strikes. But we are likely to forget tomorrow. We will never be shown their suffering in depth, nor have we experienced a similar devastation in our lives and families. Thus, we as a people are likely to repeat our folly. No wonder the Psalmist prayed that he be delivered from his unknown sins.

Ours is not a religion of abstractions, even if it finds Aristotelian, Augustinian, or Thomistic distinctions useful. It is incarnational, a faith grounded in personhood, in the body and the blood. As Lent is meant to remind us, our faith is concerned with redemption and repentance, never with self-justification. And like it or not, our Scriptures teach that in his own actions, Jesus chose self-suffering rather than recourse to force. He refused the sword, even to protect his followers—who were initially scattered. Yet his blood freed them, as it did his torturers; frees us, as it does our enemies. We have yet to understand the significance of it all.

PATRICK JORDAN

Patrick Jordan is the managing editor of Commonweal.

LIMITS OF THE JUST WAR

EASIER SAID THAN DONE

I judge the war against Iraq to be ill-advised and imprudent, but not as some suggest either unjust or immoral. Indeed, while we must demand a limited war, I think there is something carping and unconvincing about second-guessing every military decision. At this time, I see no evidence of moral illiteracy in the U.S. command. Quite the contrary. When that changes, I'll change.

It was especially ironic for churches to condemn U.S. policy out of hand just as Congress completed an all but unprecedented moral debate over the use of force. By any reasonable interpretation, the war has met—to the degree any prior evaluation can—the criteria of just cause, proper authority, last resort, likely outcome, and proportional means. Critics of U.S. intervention demanded UN approval and a congressional declaration, and when they got both seemed to dismiss such authority as ultimately irrelevant. They demanded we not rush to war, but after five months during which Iraq pillaged Kuwait and prepared to protect its gains they continued to cling to the infinite regression implicit in any "last" resort contingency. For many, one suspects, the just war theory was simply employed as a no war theory. (Pacifism is a legitimate position, but it doesn't leave much room for discussion.)

I am not saying the argument is over or dissent inadmissible. I am not even saying President George Bush is right—I think he's wrong. I am saying it is implausible at this point for those in opposition to the war to employ the rhetoric of righteousness.

There are further ironies. Some people who argue the inviolability of individual conscience on questions of birth control and personal morality seize upon the just-war theory as though it were handed down on Mt. Sinai. I'm not so sure it's such an infallible document. If anything, the debate over war in the Persian Gulf has illuminated some of the theory's inadequacies. As in the question of nuclear deterrence, just-war claims seem to leave a good deal of practical reality (or practical madness) out of the equation.

For example, reconciling massive nuclear retaliation with notions of proportionality is a contortionist's trick, not a philosopher's achievement. Surely a renunciation of such indiscriminate slaughter is the only response consistent with just-war conditions. That rules out nuclear deterrence, for there can be no deterrence without the projection of a credible threat—namely a willingness to do the unthinkable. But renouncing the use of nuclear weapons leaves one rather at the mercy of less scrupulous opponents. Faith in God is one answer, true. But we are also cautioned against testing God's benevolence. Moreover, do we have the right to insist that our neighbors share the risk of powerlessness our moral conviction requires? I don't think so. Indeed, questions of nuclear war offer only tragic or absurd alternatives and utterly

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ambiguous moral choices. What if, for example, we "won" the cold war, defeating Soviet totalitarianism and helping to liberate Eastern Europe, because of our nuclear belligerence? How does the morality of nuclear arms shake out then? A good outcome doesn't justify an inherently immoral means? Ask the Czechoslovakians whether we should have pressured the Russians.

Similarly, pertinent questions about a war against a regime like Iraq's are slighted by a rigorous application of just-war theory. Last resort, as already noted, is an endlessly receding horizon. Strictly interpreted it is hard to imagine what, short of an act of self-defense, last resort might be. Clearly, it is all but impossible to reconcile last resort with the idea of a preemptive strike. Yet I can imagine any number of circumstances where a preemptive strike would save lives and forestall greater evil. Israel's actions in 1967 as well as their destruction of Iraq's nuclear plant in 1981 are two. Just-war theory would seem to foreclose such options, and in doing so it flies in the face of elemental logic and much of human experience. In other words, fighting a bully may require a few dirty tricks. But something in the cool scholastic operations of just-war theory—like that in the scholastic proofs of God's existence—fails to encompass the true nature and threat of evil in the world.

A proportionate use of force is necessary and of course the indiscriminate bombing of civilian populations is unacceptable. But such stark choices are of little help in the more difficult and likely cases, as in Iraq, where soldiers must battle an adversary who uses civilians for protection, or where the enemy may use chemical or biological weapons. If Iraq directs a chemical attack from a bunker surrounded by civilians what do you do? Similarly, it is all very comforting to hear that we are not interested in fighting the people of Iraq or intend them any harm. Yet it is their cities we are bombing and their sons we aim to kill. To the extent that just-war definitions suggest there is some clean way to separate the people from the actions of their state it fosters dangerous illusions about the nature of modern war. One is reminded that at one time the use of the crossbow violated just-war theory. Such abstract distinctions are little more than efforts to hide from ourselves the truth of what we are actually doing.

I'm not suggesting we dispense with moral guidelines such as the just-war theory, but I do think they need to be employed with a greater sense of their artificiality, especially by those of us thousands of miles from the actual fighting and dying. Like the church's prohibition against contraception, it may not always be the moral tool that effects the most moral result.

As for the specifics of the present war, Bush and his advisers, for reasons both sound and specious, judged that economic sanctions would not bring Saddam Hussein to heel. More important, I imagine, they concluded that only a military confrontation would neutralize his power and stabilize the region. Finally, however, it was Hussein's actions that precipitated the confrontation.

I think the unintended consequences of any war of this size in that part of the world make it a very dubious enterprise. Too many things can go wrong, from the intervention of Israel or Iran, to a crisis in the Soviet Union, to the more likely martyrdom of Iraq and consequent political triumph of Hussein. But I may be wrong. And my tentativeness is not without a moral burden of its own. In essence I was willing to tolerate the sacrifice of Kuwaitis to a vicious foe to spare American lives and presumably prevent greater regional turmoil and bloodshed. That's a big presumption, and one that's a lot easier on me than on the Kuwaitis.

Ultimately, war in this instance was a question of prudential judgment. If anything, Saddam Hussein's actions have confirmed the worst fears about his ambitions and capacity for evil. Consequently, I think it behooves critics of the war to avoid moralistic denunciations. This will help preserve the spirit of civil discourse and disagreement so remarkably present in the debate prior to the war.

PAUL BAUMANN

Paul Baumann is an associate editor of Commonweal.

OF SEVERAL MINDS David R. Carlin, Jr.

EAST MEETS WEST

THE WORLD'S LONGEST WAR

In the interest of keeping things in perspective, it may be worth noting that the current war against Iraq is simply the latest phase of an old struggle between Western Asia (or the Near East or Mideast) and the European world (including of course the European diaspora, e.g., the United States). This ancient struggle is the world's great continuing war, compared to which events like the Thirty Years War or the Hundred Years War are but moments in time. The Europe-Western Asia battle has been going on for twenty-five hundred years according to the historical record, and more than three thousand if we add the testimony of Homer, whose *Iliad* is the story of a European attack on a Western Asia city.

Passing over the Trojan War, let's look at the principal stages in this old contest:

1. *The Persian Wars.* At Marathon (490 B.C.) the Athenians repulsed a small army sent by Darius, the Great King of Persia. Ten years later the next Great King, Xerxes, saying "No more Mr. Nice Guy," personally led a great expedition across the Hellespont. Xerxes won at Thermopylae ("Stranger, go tell the Spartans that we lie here obedient to their orders"), and he seized and burned Athens, which had been abandoned by its citizens. But he was defeated at sea by Themistocles the Athenian at Salamis (480) and on land by Pausanias the Spartan at Plataea (479). Round I to the Europeans.

2. *Alexander the Great.* In 334 B.C.,

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twenty-one-year-old Alexander, carrying out plans laid by his recently assassinated father, King Philip of Macedon, crossed the Hellespont in the direction opposite that followed by Xerxes one hundred and fifty years earlier. By the time he died (323) Alexander had conquered the vast Persian Empire along with Egypt and a number of lesser kingdoms, extending European rule throughout all Western Asia, right up to the borders of India. Along the way he burned the capital of Persia—to even the score for the Persian burning of Athens in 480. He died in Babylon, the ancient city on the Euphrates, not far from where Baghdad would later be built (A.D. 762) and later still be bombed (A.D. 1991). Alexander's career represents the high-water mark of European advance into Western Asia. Round II to the Europeans.

3. *The Punic Wars.* Though located in North Africa, towards the western end of the Mediterranean, Carthage was a colony of the Phoenician city of Tyre. Hence its empire, which included considerable portions of North Africa, Sicily, and Spain, was neither an African nor European empire but a Western Asian empire; and its struggle with Rome—a struggle that began in the early third century B.C., lasted through three wars (including the greatest and most famous of them all, the Second Punic War, which pitted Rome against Hannibal), and ended with the razing of the city of Carthage in the middle of the second century B.C.—was a contest between Europe and Asia for control of the West. Round III to the Europeans.

4. *Rome* vs. *Asia.* In 53 B.C., Marcus Crassus, colleague of Caesar and Pompey in the first triumvirate, was defeated and killed by the Parthians in the battle of Carrhae, in northwestern Mesopotamia (modern Iraq). From then until about A.D. 630, Rome fought countless wars against the Parthian Empire and its successor, the neo-Persian Empire. The border between East and West shifted time and again, the furthest European advance taking place during the reign of the Emperor Trajan (A.D. 98-117). Terrible wars between Constantinople and Persia in the early seventh century softened both empires up for attack by the Arabs. Round IV a draw.

5. *Arab Expansion.* Though it took nearly a thousand years of looking, Asia finally discovered the champion needed for a definitive reversal of the Alexandrine conquests: the Arabs, who, with their new and militant religion of Islam, broke out of Arabia in the 630s and quickly conquered all of Persia and much of the Byzantine Empire. By the early 700s the Arabs had captured all of North Africa (which until then had been part of the European world, but has remained part of the Western Asian world ever since) and most of Spain. Their progress into Europe was not stopped till 732, when they were defeated by Charles Martel at the battle of Tours. Round V to the Asians.

6. *The Crusades.* The European counterattack had begun in Spain, where from the time of Charlemagne Christians had been

slowly pushing back the Arab advance, though the final victory in Spain did not take place until the fall of Granada (1492). But the counterattack was carried to Western Asia's home territory when Europe, inspired by Pope Urban II and adopting the Islamic concept of "holy war," conquered Palestine and the Levant in the First Crusade (1096-99). But the Europeans could not hold their gains in the long run; and in 1270, after a long series of reverses, the final Crusade, under the leadership of Louis IX of France (St. Louis), met defeat. After one hundred and seventy-five years of struggle, the Muslims—by now under the leadership of the Seljuk Turks, not the Arabs—had repulsed the European invader. Round VI to the Asians.

7. *The Coming of the Ottomans.* In 1453 the Ottoman Turks did what the Arabs were unable to do centuries before: conquer Constantinople, thereby bringing to an end the Eastern Roman Empire, more than twenty-two hundred years after the legendary date of the founding of Rome. Under the Ottomans, Western Asia dominated southeastern Europe for centuries, twice reaching the walls of Vienna, in 1529 and again in 1683. This was the farthest Asian advance into the heart of Europe since the battle of Tours in 732. Round VII to the Asians.

8. *The Age of European Imperialism.* During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Ottoman Empire ("the sick man of Europe") disintegrated, and Asia was once again expelled from Europe, retaining only Istanbul and its environs. European colonial powers dominated North Africa; Russia extended its empire southward into Central Asia; and Britain and France brought Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Arabia under their direction. This was the greatest reflux of Europe into the world of Western Asia since the rise of the Arabs in the seventh century. Round VIII to the Europeans.

9. *Israel.* The Balfour Declaration (1917) committed Britain to providing a Jewish homeland in Palestine. By the time Britain had second thoughts about its commitment, it was too late; the Zionists had begun arriving, and they were determined to stay. Though bearing a resemblance to other European colonial plantations, Zionism was European colonialism with a difference—a radical difference. Unlike colonists elsewhere, the Zionists were Europeans who meant to renounce their European identity, who had no European home to return to when the overseas venture turned sour. The trouble is that despite renunciation of their European identity, the Zionists were perceived by the Arabs as Europeans, hence as invaders—the latest in an ancient line of Western invaders. Round IX...not finished yet.

And now, after three thousand years, the United States has finally become a participant in the longest war, with George Bush playing the role of Agamemnon, Saddam Hussein the dual role of Priam and Paris, and lovely Kuwait in the role of Helen, the face that launched a thousand missiles.

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WHY THEOLOGY IS HARD TO READ

AND WHY YOU SHOULD DO IT ANYWAY

ROBERT J. EGAN

An old friend of mine complains that although she used to be an avid reader of good theology, she no longer reads much theology at all. It isn't that she's lost her faith or her commitment to the intellectual life, yet she no longer enjoys curling up on a cold winter's night with a new theology book. She asks me to explain this.

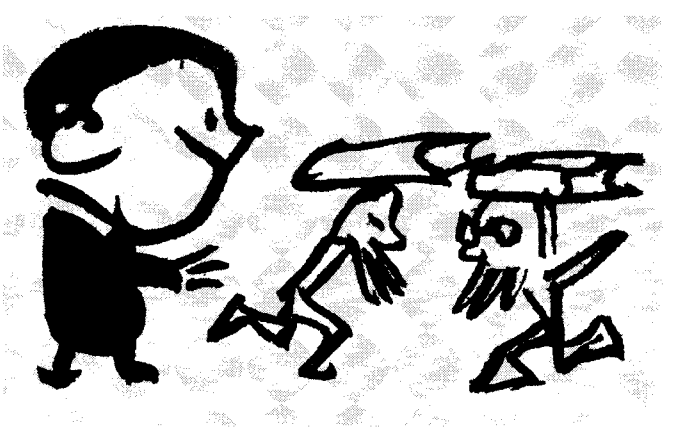
I pretend to be surprised, to sound slightly disapproving. But frankly—-one must admit it—she is not alone in this neglect. Many of my Catholic friends do not read much theology, much less feel the need to stay abreast of the field or to take stands on issues of current controversy. Their desire to understand their lives continues to be nourished by poetry and anthropology, biography and history, psychology and social theory, and an endless flow of serious little journals and daily newspapers, but for the most part no longer by books and articles by theologians. Why is this?

I know this is not the whole picture. A good number of people out there keep buying books by Karl Rahner, Raymond Brown, Hans Küng, Avery Dulles, and Richard McBrien, and presumably reading them. And there is always a large audience for devotional works and popular spirituality. But still—yes, yes—there are problems. As a serious intellectual discipline, theology has become more and more pluralistic, more and more specialized, and more and more technical. There is no wide agreement about how to organize the field, how to conceptualize its tasks and methods, how to determine its subdivisions, where to house it, how to teach it, or how to relate it to biblical studies, philosophy of religion, comparative religious studies, or other related investigations. Furthermore, it is difficult to relate this sprawling, austere, complicated, and disorganized enterprise to our real-life experiences today and to our struggles to keep the faith. It can seem merely a big, blooming, buzzing confusion.

In the first place, contemporary theology in general is not very enjoyable to read. This is the most obvious difficulty. Theologians as a group are perhaps too accustomed to addressing captive audiences, especially ministry students. There are exceptions, but most theologians do not feel required to become good writers or to aspire to the standards of "a good book." Their texts are often long, complex, unshapely, and badly in need of good editing. They are often written in a graceless, benumbing prose, under the unhappy influence of German (or more recently French) academic writing, a strange mix of ordinary language and several technical languages at once, criss-crossed by a thousand controversies.

This problem is not peculiar to theology, of course. Hundreds of tirades, warnings, and satires have been written on the prose styles of contemporary academics. The laws of academic life dispose people to produce texts mainly for their colleagues' admiration, and this inevitably affects theologians too. There is an irony in this. Most moderate and progressive theologians would want to support those movements in the church which insist that "the whole community is the church" and that "we are all responsible for the church," and yet their writing style imposes on their books a very high admission price, and leaves most of the poor People of God out in the cold.

Beyond this issue of style, theology is difficult in other ways. It can be troubling and confusing and discouraging sometimes. I know of no easy way around this problem. Theologians might as well acknowledge this at once, and confess to all the charges! Still, I want to argue that all these difficulties do not excuse us from our responsibility to read theology, to think through the



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meaning of the faith we practice, to be accountable for the claims we make in the version of Catholicism we live.

It is somewhat consoling to put this all in some historical perspective. The disciples closest to Jesus were already complaining that they couldn't catch the drift of what he was saying; and the Second Letter of Peter complains, for the record, that the theology of St. Paul is "hard to understand" (2 Peter 3: 15-16). This shouldn't surprise us; the subject matter of theology has to do with the ultimate mysteries of our existence. In addition, there have been worries from the beginning about the actual dangers to faith and virtue posed by the arguments of theologians. In the same letter of Peter, we hear complaints of "cleverly devised myths," "false teachers," "destructive heresies," "waterless springs" and "mists driven by storms," "slaves of corruption," "scoffers," and people both "ignorant and unstable" who "twist" those hard-to-understand teachings of St. Paul to their own ugly purposes. There has probably never been a time in the church's long history—think of it!—when these kinds of things were not being said about somebody else's theology.

Bad enough, but since at least the time of Plato, and especially since the Enlightenment, ways of interpreting religion have been available to intellectuals which have the effect of distancing them from the religious imagination of ordinary people and calling into question the reasonableness and coherence of popular religion as a whole. These ideas—by the great masters of suspicion—more and more influence the general intellectual climate within which Christian theology itself is done. Whether by osmosis, or paradoxically through debate itself, they create frameworks of assumptions and impressions, "plausibility structures," which may create further difficulties for a lively, heartfelt faith and devotion. In this way, if there is no consolidation of faith at a different level of reflection—what Paul Ricoeur calls a "second naiveté"—theology may erode the size of its own audience, becoming a halfway house on the journey to unbelief.

Also—one must admit it—theologians themselves are frail mortals with limited abilities. They are sometimes baffled, sometimes tired, sometimes out of sorts, sometimes guilty of evasion or grandstanding. This contributes to the difficulties of theology. And, as everyone knows, even the most brilliant professors are sometimes—often—very weird. Hiring, promotion, and tenure in our universities are not based on depth of sanity, emotional maturity, poetic intuition, pastoral sensitivity, or warmth. So sometimes theologians are lovely people, and sometimes they may be, for the devout soul, something like a winter gale.

Beyond the personal failings of theologians, there are the limitations and demands imposed by the institutional settings and cultural locations of theology. In the United States right now, theology is housed almost entirely in academic institutions. The ethos of these places with its own peculiar strengths and temptations, has now become the primary horizon of theology's way of thinking. Within the academy, theology is a vast, disorganized, and complicated field, incorporating biblical studies, church history, fundamental and philosophical theology, systematic or doctrinal theology, moral theology, social ethics, spiritual and mys-

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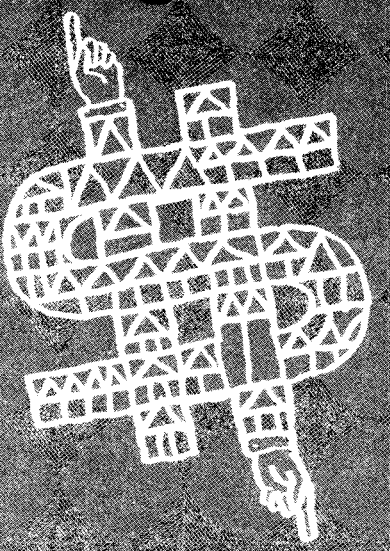

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tical theology, and pastoral theology, or practical theology, as well as various entanglements, as we've seen, with philosophy of religion, the sociology and psychology of religion, the history of religions, and various theological excursions into literature, the social sciences, and many other things. All of these conversations are going forward at the same time, and nobody could possibly keep up to date in all of them simultaneously.

As a practice, Catholic theology has changed enormously in the last thirty years—in its settings, its players, its goals and strategies, its intended audience. In a second article, which will appear later this Spring, I will return to these matters. But here we should note that these changes, positive in themselves and life-giving in many ways, add to the difficulty of understanding what theologians are doing.

Besides the issue of style, the possible dangers to faith, the personal failings of theologians, the limits imposed by academic institutions, and the dramatic recent changes in the practice of theology, there are still several other reasons why reading contemporary theology is hard. A further reason has to do with the intellectual frameworks it employs. Catholic theology is mediated by both philosophy and history—sometimes more by one, sometimes more by the other. In either case, it always depends in some ways on developments in both philosophical analysis and historical scholarship.

So to come upon a discussion among contemporary theologians is to walk in off the street in the middle of an argument—about Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, Kant and Hegel, Kierkegaard and Marx, James and Dewey, Nietzsche and Freud, Durkheim and Weber, Whitehead and Husserl, Wittgenstein and Heidegger, and, more recently, Gadamer and Ricoeur, Habermas and Foucault, Rorty and Derrida, MacIntyre and Taylor—which, though unquestionably

A path through the woods

Let's say you are convinced of the importance of reading contemporary theology, but you are uncertain how to begin. Some people, hungry for primary sources and scornful of commentary, will want to plunge head first into Hegel or Schleiermacher, or several volumes of Rahner's *Theological Investigations*. We bid them Godspeed. But for the others who might like some preliminary overviews and brief surveys, with notes and good selective bibliographies, I conclude with mention of sixteen books which could lead you through the initial dark of the woods and, hopefully, into some clearing. I believe that if readers, alone or with a group of friends, were to work their way through, say two-thirds of these books, over a period of a year or two, that they would have a solid basis for entering theological conversation at least in systematic and fundamental theology.

For Catholics, the watershed was Vatican II. I would recommend starting with two books about the council. First, I'd encourage everyone to read John W. O'Malley's *Tradition and Transition: Historical Perspectives on Vatican II* (Michael Glazier, 1989), which sets the council in the long view of Christian history. The intelligence, strong focus, and balance of these reflections, and the inherent importance of their basic themes and ideas—including our understanding of tradition, our narrative accounts of continuity and discontinuity, the crucial idea of ecclesial "reform," the variety of types of renewal in church history, and the distinctive character of the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II, as well as the evolving forms and expressions of ministry in the church, and the idea of priesthood as an analogical rather than a univocal one—make this book a very helpful and thought-provoking place to begin.

Alongside it, I would recommend *Modern Catholicism: Vatican II and After* (Oxford University Press, 1990), edited by Adrian Hastings, a large book of generally high quality, with a team of good contributors, including Gerald Fogarty, Joseph Gremillion, Enda McDonagh, Rosemary Ruether, Brian Wicker, and over thirty others. It includes sections on recent church history, each of the major documents of the council, issues of institutional renewal, "unfinished business" and "aspects of church life," the effect of the council on world Catholicism by region, and ecumenical relations. Of particular interest for our purposes here is the article, "Catholic Theology in the Post-Conciliar Period" by John McDade, the editor of *The Month*.

Next, place on your reading table six books. For range, details, first acquaintances, and for reference, begin with the fourth edition of John Macquarrie's *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought* (Trinity Press, 1988), with its excellent twenty-third chapter on the more recent developments. Then, work your way, a chapter at a time (though in almost any order), through the revised edition of *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, edited by Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (Fortress Press, 1985), an ecumenical collaboration among outstanding scholars, including contributions by the editors, David Tracy, Langdon Gilkey, Edward Farley, Carl Braaten, John B. Cobb, Jr., Sallie McFague, and several others, and organized by traditional topics (e.g., God, revelation, method, sin and evil, Christ and salvation, the church), providing historical background, an overview of contemporary debates, and selected bibliographies.

I would then recommend the two more recent volumes edited by David F. Ford, *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Basil Blackwell, 1989). This set also gathers together a group of talented contributors writing on the theologies of the century, but the articles are not on topics, but on individual

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stimulating, is far removed from the comfortable neighborhoods of anybody's current common sense. These arguments require from us a disciplined (and inevitably disturbing) investigation of what we mean or think we mean by God or self, by truth or or history, by being certain or being free, or by the true end of our hearts' desire, which is asking rather a lot on an ordinary weekend.

Even this litany of names is misleading, for the issues are profound and urgent, and any one of the major figures could set an agenda for a lifetime. An individual might spend many years working out the implications for theology of the thought of Marx or Kierkegaard, while someone else is trying to imagine the meaning of theology after Freud, or after Wittgenstein, or after the encounter with Vajrayana Buddhism. These projects do not fit neatly together. No theologian encompasses all of these questions, much less answers all of them carefully! Yet theology must be undertaken on many fronts at once, for it seems only natural that some Christians should be Augustinians or Thomists, Hegelians or Whiteheadians, while others are Heideggerians, Gadamerians, or Habermasians, or students of Sufism or the Dharma. It's a big church; we inherit a strongly intellectual and argumentative tradition; and we're more and more a well educated people, living mostly in large urban settings. How could it be otherwise?

In addition to this arduous philosophical conversation, there is the constantly growing body of specialized literature explaining and interpreting the New Testament. In the past, it was possible for systematic theologians to quote their favorite biblical passages and leave the technical work to other scholars; but now it would be hard to do systematic theology without gaining some competence, however qualified, in New Testament research. Reading theology now requires making responsible judgments about the meaning of these texts.

Christian theology must also include a serious study of Israelite

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theologians or schools. The first volume has chapters on Schillebeeckx, Küng, Rahner, Lonergan, Congar, and von Balthasar, as well as Barth, Bonhoeffer, Torrance, Jungel, Bultmann, Tillich, Pannenberg, and Moltmann. The second volume has sections on recent British and North American theologies in the ecumenical mainstream, recent Orthodox and Evangelical theologies, "new challenges," and "religious diversity."

Next I'd recommend *Faithful Witness: Foundations of Theology for Today's Church* (Crossroad, 1989), edited by Leo J. O'Donovan and T. Howland Sanks, which is topically organized like the Hodgson and King collection, including chapters on faith, revelation, Scripture, church, method, and Christology, with good notes and short bibliographies, but written from within the perspectives of North American Catholicism. It has chapters from the editors, Monika Hellwig, Joseph Komonchak, Justin Kelly, Pheme Perkins, John Langan, David Hollenbach, and several others. Finally, any one of these topics and many more can be pursued further in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Joseph Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot Lane (Michael Glazier, 1987).

In addition to these eight books, I would then add four more. James P. Mackey's *Modern Theology: A Sense of Direction* (Oxford University Press, 1987) is a brief, thoughtful, more personal discussion of the whole range of recent theology, with attention to both contemporary philosophy and New Testament studies, and their bearing on our ordinary lives. Of all the developments or movements of theology in these last twenty-five years, none is morally or religiously more important or challenging than the "theology of liberation" which emerged from the churches of Latin America, and which has found resonance among many groups in our own country and in many other nations as well. Among the many recent studies of this movement by North Americans, I would recommend especially Arthur F. McGovern's *Liberation Theology and Its Critics: Toward an Assessment* (Orbis Press, 1989), a thorough, fair-minded, and strongly argued book, which unlike some of the others pays serious attention to the real social and historical context of these theologies and to the scale of the human suffering they confront.

Of comparable importance, but closer to home, the feminist movement in its various aspects has profoundly affected our self-understanding, as well as our research and reflection across the boundaries of all the disciplines. Anne E. Carr's *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (Harper & Row, 1988) is a good general introduction to its implications for theology and church life. Bernard J. Cooke's *The Distancing of God: The Ambiguity of Symbol in History and Theology* (Fortress Press, 1990) is a comprehensive, carefully considered survey of the whole history of Christian life from the perspective of one crucial question—just what one might hope for from a "sacramental theologian"—of how symbols and practices mediated or failed to mediate the experience of God's redemptive and transformative presence.

Finally, any consideration of recent Catholic theology will come eventually to the towering figures of Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Bernard Lonergan, and Edward Schillebeeckx. They are still far out ahead of us. There are good collections of introductory essays on their work: Leo J. O'Donovan, ed., *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology* (Seabury Press, 1980); John Riches, ed., *The Analogy of Beauty: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (T. & T. Clark, 1986); Vernon Gregson, ed., *The Desires of the Human Heart: An Introduction to the Theology of Bernard Lonergan* (Paulist Press, 1988); and Robert Schreiter and Mary Catherine Hilkert, eds., *The Praxis of Christian Experience: An Orientation to Edward Schillebeeckx* (Harper & Row, 1989). R.J.E.

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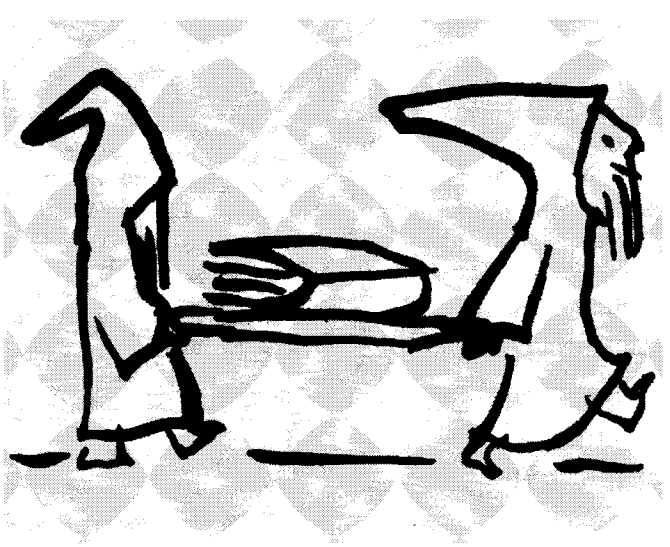
history and Hebrew scriptures, of the nature of prophecy and the meaning of covenant, of the diversity of Second Temple Judaism and of the milieu of the early Jesus movement, and the whole subsequent history of Jewish-Christian relations and definition, the deformations of anti-Semitism, and the context of the contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue, which is changing our understanding of ourselves. And besides all this, there is church history: the reception, practice, and transmission of Christian religion and of reflection on its meaning, in the perspectives of intellectual history, of institutional history, but also of social and cultural history.

In the last few decades, it is not only philosophy and history and biblical studies which inform theological reflection, but also various psychologies and sociologies, cultural anthropologies, political and social theories, linguistic and literary-critical theories, feminist theories, and more and more, the physical and life sciences. These other disciplines also include the wider histories of religious belief and practice, like those of Mircea Eliade, and the study of the great intellectual and spiritual traditions of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism.

In addition, theologians must offer not only strong and persuasive re-interpretations of the tradition of the faith in these new and unprecedented circumstances, but also intelligent and compelling interpretations of the contemporary situation itself. Here, given the complexity of the age, different theologians, of course, have made different decisions and chosen different emphases, one pointing more to historicity, another more to cultural pluralism, another more to the suffering of the poor. They will set out in different directions, to counter the influence of greed, or individualism, or positivism, or relativism, or "impression management" in their own cultural environments. Among the voices of all the different disciplines and traditions, Christian theologians, in their own distinctive contexts, must struggle to understand the age we live in, and then to give utterance again, in a language that is fresh and honest, to the fullness of the meaning of the gospel.

For all these reasons, reading theology is difficult. Added all together they are very impressive indeed, but there is something else, one more, one final factor that makes the needed effort seem futile.



For my friend, for many of my friends, theology does not seem related to real life. It seems cut off from their daily concerns and worries, their deeper feelings, their everyday hopes and fears and responsibilities, from the stories and images that shape their real experience. Theology is mostly absent from their conversations at work, from their arguments with friends, from their table talk with family.

The bigger problem, I want to argue, is that religion itself does not seem related to "real life" in this country. Our lives go on as they must, organized in the public categories and images of everyday thought and action, which in turn help shape the habits of our imaginations, while we are in some way "prescinding from our religious beliefs," which are thought to be bracketed (or kept in the private sphere).

There are good reasons of course to prefer secular societies to the usual alternatives, but there is a price to pay. The longing for more abundant life at the heart of human beings is repressed. We live more and more in a prison house of banality. The very range and vitality of the secular culture creates an aura of implausibility around any expression of religious seriousness. Meanwhile, the world mediated by the mass media is one in which a serious, intelligent practice of religion has been almost completely erased, just brushed out; we grow accustomed to an ignorant, authoritarian, and moralizing religious fervor, a cartoon version of Christianity.

This tendency in the popular culture becomes an object of faith among many intellectuals; in fact, there is a strong prejudice among some of our elites that no intelligent person can be both religious and sincere. In many academic and artistic (and some political) circles, these days, it would require some nerve to acknowledge that one took religion seriously, much less that one actually believed in God. And in many such circles, being a "practicing Catholic" nowadays is really beyond the pale.

If religion is marginalized, then theology is crowded to the very edge. If no one expects faith to be intelligent, or intelligence to be devout, why would anyone read theology? Even intellectuals who do take religion seriously may find it easier to speak of it with indirection, in large generalities, with allusions to several traditions, than to turn to the shamelessly direct discourse of theology.

In our culture today, outside the ministry, no one is required to know anything at all about theology. No amount of ignorance about it is too much. In fact, no amount of ignorance about religion in general is considered embarrassing in public nowadays, even for very well educated people. Matthew Lamb has asked recently: "Will Catholics succumb to the tendencies in American culture that secularize institutions of reason and fundamentalize institutions of faith?" (*America,* May 26, 1990). Theology is having trouble getting its voice heard in the current conversation of humankind.

Yes, all this must be admitted. Still, none of this, I think, is really an adequate reason for educated Catholics to bow to the

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prevailing plausibility structures or to excuse themselves from their responsibility to read theology. Reading—regular, disciplined, reflective, honest, humble *reading*—has becomes one of the most important ascetical practices for adult faith in our time. Reading about history, politics, economics, warfare, morality, and religion—not just reading for entertainment or self-improvement—has become a duty of discipleship as well as of citizenship. And "theology" is serious thinking about the religion we ourselves are practicing. It is the only serious thinking we have on the subject. We cannot simply leave it to the clergy or to the experts.

Consciously or unconsciously, we are always practicing one theology or another: in our parishes, schools, chancery offices, and retreat houses of course, but even in our kitchens and bedrooms and living rooms, in our courtrooms and factories and offices, in our songs and ceremonies, our politics and our conversations with friends. We are praying to some power, sacrificing at some altar, offering our lives in the service of some god, interpreting our basic trust in some way. We live inside a "theology" one way or another. Now we all have to learn how to evaluate the ones we inhabit in the light of the whole Catholic tradition and in consideration of the contemporary questions people are asking about the reasons for our hope. We are used to treating theology as the virtuoso performance of solitary individuals. Now we have to conceive it as a social process.

If theology is serious thinking about our lives with each other at their deeper levels, the effort (borrowing a phrase from Hannah Arendt) "to think what we are doing" together, then we all need to be reading and thinking and praying and talking about this together. We all need to be in on the conversation. And theology is a fully public conversation. It is not just whatever we wish or imagine it to be. It is going on "out there" whether we are paying attention or not. We can only choose to be knowledgeable about it or ignorant. So for all of its difficulties, complexities and dangers, for all its distance from our everyday lives and ordinary languages, there is still a sense in which theology is inescapable for us. If we are practicing some theologies everyday, then the urgent questions are: What is their quality? Where do they come from? What are their grounds?

Eventually it becomes necessary, then, to try to make sense out of contemporary theology. Some of it is arrogant and merely fashionable, no doubt, but much of it is deeply intelligent, brilliantly imagined, and very admirable. It is almost certainly better than we deserve. A good case can be made for saying that we are living through a rebirth of Catholic theology in the second half of this century that is one of the richest periods in our entire history. In my judgment we should be grateful for it.

We know much more today about the New Testament, the world out of which it came, its theological complexities and literary strategies, the significance of the preaching and the parables of Jesus, the pluralism of the early church, and many other things concerning our origins. We know more than we ever have before about our own history as a church with all its diversity, grandeur, ambiguity, and terrors. We have begun to understand

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the centrality of "the eschatological" and "the messianic" in the early Christian movement, and the integration of the mystical and the prophetic which these categories require. We have created a conversation among ourselves in which the claims of exegetes, historians, and philosophers can be brought forward thoughtfully and their implications for faith and self-understanding considered from different perspectives.

In a pluralistic, historically conscious, politically awakened, and ecologically challenged world, in a world of too much suffering, and too much poverty, devastated by war after war, and darkened by the alienation between thought and spirit, Catholic theology continues to speak of faith and forgiveness, of God and more abundant life, of reason and love, of community and human solidarity, of the importance of worship and the symbolic imagination, of the demands of justice, and of hope for victims of oppression, even of hope for the dead. Such speaking is bread of life for all of us, good food for our souls.

To be a responsible Catholic today, our thinking itself must be awakened by faith, grounded in faith, shaped by the imagination of a faithful heart. It must be educated by the rigorous questioning and conversation of the whole community, in its critical, creative, repentant, and obedient appropriation of tradition. In order to "think what we are doing," from now on, we must all be involved in a renewed practice of theology.

SCREEN

EMPTY HOUSES

'ALICE' & 'RUSSIA HOUSE'

Woody Allen's *Alice* is an anomaly: a cleverly written, fluently directed bit of fluff about a woman's spiritual transformation. Allen has become a technician of suave, easygoing power. When he introduces us to the hyper-yuppie couple, Alice and Doug Tate, in their East Side New York apartment, he does so in a single shot that lasts about ninety seconds. And in that minute-and-a-half we see Alice greet and deal with her husband, children, physical trainer, decorator, cook, maid, and a member of a parent pool who has come to drive the kids to kindergarten. This single shot staging isn't just economical; it's meaningful and funny. As the camera pans back and forth in the huge, flesh-toned apartment (that has a hall as big as a hotel corridor) the employees and acquaintances seem to spring out of the woodwork. The place is infested with affluence and the mousy Alice can't really deal with such hectic comfort. She's uneasy and there is an ache in her lower back that no expensive drug or massage can alleviate. She goes to a Dr. Yang of Chinatown who provides magic herbs that grant her, by turns, sexual boldness, invisibility, contact with the ghost of a former lover, advice from a literary muse, and (disastrously) the power to enthrall every single male at a cocktail party.

Much of the magical stuff is accomplished delightfully. When the ghostly lover, Ed, appears, he doesn't just crudely materialize à la *Topper*. Rather, his body seems to seep into a dimly lit room from some reality beyond our reality. When Dr. Yang has Alice relive her first encounter with her husband, there's no corny segue into flashback; Doug simply appears in Yang's office and the couple create the reality of the past with words and glances as the doctor looks on. Allen again demonstrates his flair for using familiar actors in slightly eccentric ways. Farrow has, as many have noticed, picked up some of her significant other's vocal patterns but these she uses with confidence and the sort of control that the more furtive Allen could never manage. She dominates the supernatural visitors and special effects by never seeming too surprised by them. Joe Mantegna brings to the part of Alice's musician-lover what he couldn't summon for his gangster in *The Godfather III*: a sustained, centered understanding of the man he plays. Mantegna's rough amiability suits well this role of a basically decent guy with strains of seediness and irresponsibility in his character. William Hurt has always had fatuousness as a color on his actor's palette. Appropriately, he dips his brush deeply into it for the part of Alice's heel of a husband. The late Keye Luke makes a great farewell appearance as Yang: he barks with unchallengeable authority.

If so much in the film is good, why doesn't it reverberate within me? The problem may be this: none of Alice's magical transformations revealed her past or her mental life for me, and, without such revelation, her final conversion carries little weight. For instance, that reenacted first date with her husband-to-be I have praised for its avoidance of the clichés of flashback. But that is, alas, its main virtue. At the conclusion of the scene, I knew no more of why Alice had been drawn to this particular man than before it started. The dialogue in it is nothing but generic courting conversation that could have been written by any apprentice playwright for any pair of cardboard lovers. The case is the same for Alice's scenes with her sister: generic sibling needling and reconciliation. (Contrast these scenes with the sisterly get-togethers in *Hannah and Her Sisters* where the siblings listen and don't listen to each other like particular women from a particular family.)

In fact, I'm stuck with the impression that Allen wrote this script very quickly and too enthusiastically, with great enthusiasm for its magical devices but little insight into his own characters. Allen the writer merely set Allen the director a series of technical tasks that the latter then dextrously fulfilled. But, at the film's conclusion, when Dr. Yang declares that Alice now has a better understanding of who she is, I'm afraid that I could only respond, "But I don't!" *Alice* has the strange distinction of being the least vivid good movie of the year.

But, at least while you're actually looking at it, *Alice* lives. That's more than I cay say for *The Russia House*. Touted by its advertisers and by some of the critics as the quality movie of the Christmas season, the film most likely to make you feel like Mr. or Mrs. Big Brain just for being in its audience, this adaptation of the le Carré book worked upon my midbrain like twenty extra-strength sleeping pills followed by a good mas-

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sage. No character in it revealed new facets after his/her first five minutes on screen. (Yes, yes, I know Sean Connery's Barley redeems himself for love at the dénouement, but Connery is so lovably rumply and boozy-funny from the start that you know he has nowhere to go but straight toward amorous salvation by jumping the delicate bones of Michelle Pfeiffer.) I was never startled by details of atmosphere or action. No idea in the story ever came close to the hair-raising implications of E.M. Forster's famous assertion about what he would do if called upon to choose between betraying his friend or his country. (The movie makes everything easy for its hero by letting him betray and save his country simultaneously.) It seems to me that everyone connected with this enterprise was coasting: on their previous achievements, on the inherent power of the subject of individuals caught in the toils of cold warfare, on the reputation of le Carré, on the current interest many intelligent people take in the miseries and splendors of *glasnost*.

I haven't read *The Russia House* but, judging by the adaptation by Tom Stoppard, it must have been something of a departure for le Carré. For once, the protagonist isn't a company man but an outsider, an innocent. Barley, an alcoholic, near-bankrupt publisher, is given a scientific manuscript by a disillusioned Russian military scientist who hopes to douse whatever remains of the cold war by giving away the fact of Soviet military inadequacy. But the manuscript falls into the hands of British intelligence, whose agents then send Barley to Russia to check out the reliability of the dissident. Barley is wired so as to relay his encounters back to headquarters. How promising! Cold war skullduggery experienced through the consciousness of an individual as naive as ourselves but then examined and commented upon by the eavesdropping professionals.

But the story gradually betrays le Carré's real sympathies. He doesn't really care about Barley the outsider. He is fascinated by the insiders, the men with plugs in their ears and jargon on their tongues. When Barley, disgusted with the deceits he has been made to perpetuate, rebels and starts acting without orders, the script veers away from his consciousness and stays with the cloistered agents. To be sure, we *see* Sean Connery traipsing about Russia making contacts, but his actions become as bewildering to us as to the agents listening to him from thousands of miles away.

Fred Schepsi is one of the most acute directors alive and even here (notably in the first fifteen minutes when the agents are brainpicking a dazed, drink-sodden Barley) he does some inventive things. But the superficiality of the script has infected his direction. So many traveling shots past Russian monuments! Such a battery of lush strings on the soundtrack! (Aurally, *The Russia House* is the son of *Dr. Zhivago*.) *Glasnost* made location shooting possible and Schepsi would have been crazy to shirk the opportunity. But his camera keeps gliding through immaculate locations without ever fastening on an interesting detail, an open countenance, a thought-provoking juxtaposition. Barley keeps talking of his great love for Russia. But where are the faces of the people of Moscow and Leningrad? Where is the Russian savor? There is nothing of Russia in this film except monuments and statues.

RICHARD ALLEVA

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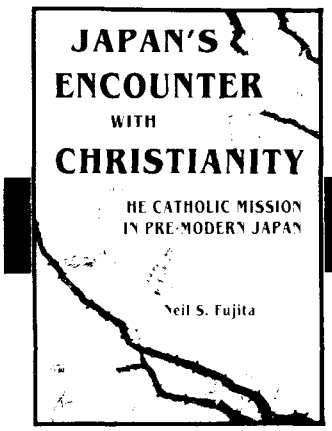

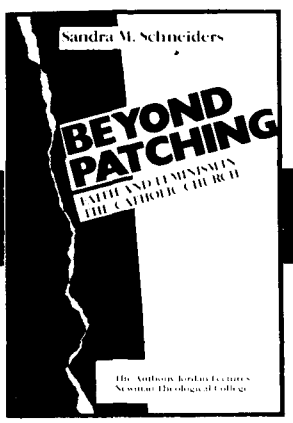

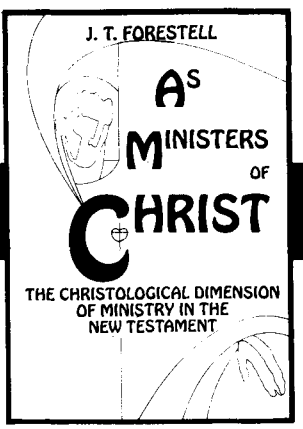

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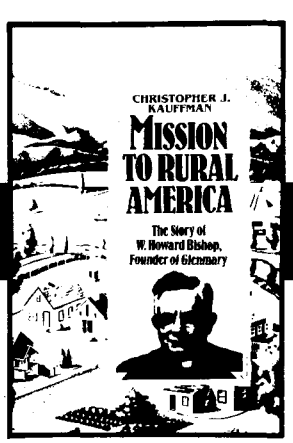

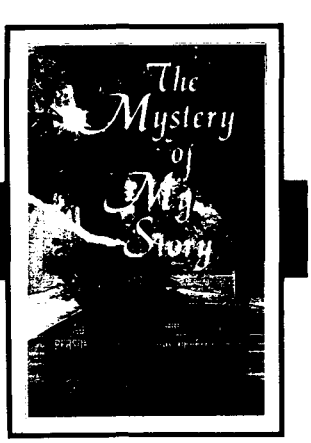

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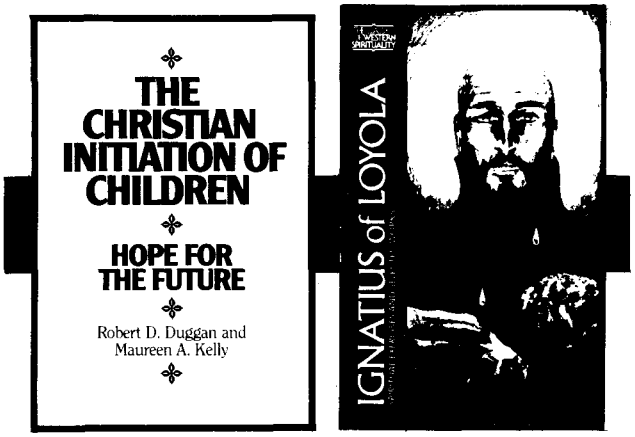

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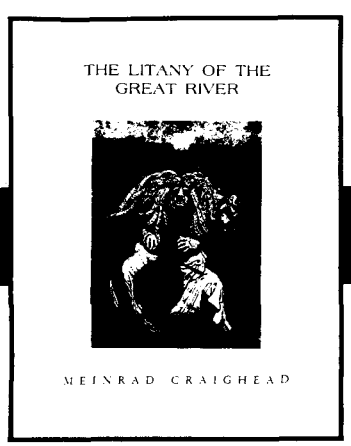

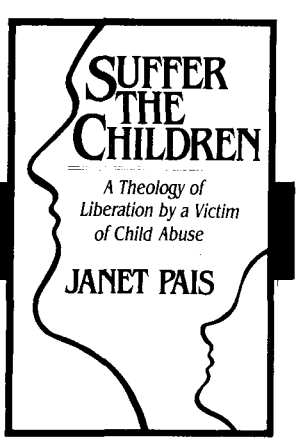

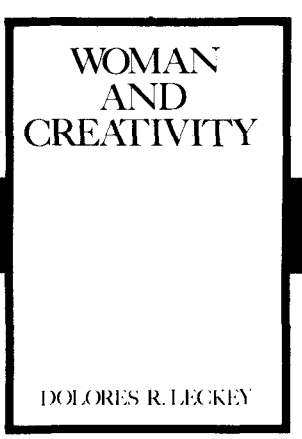

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The Prophet and his children

DAVID BURRELL & PATRICK D. GAFFNEY

The students who take our courses in classical or contemporary Islam invariably give as their reason for enrolling: "I know nothing about Islam yet feel that I should. It seems to be so important today." Perhaps that is also why we have a disproportionate number of Government and International Studies majors. Through no fault of their own, our students share the general cultural deprivation of American suburban dwellers, yet some of them have been made aware of that fact, often through overseas programs which have opened their horizons to embrace larger worlds. American Christians usually come to know Jews in their neighborhoods and their schools, but friendship or even acquaintance with Muslims is harder to come by.

Moreover, echoes of the conflict in the state of Israel and the occupied territories have long been picked up in a milieu like our own, which is predominantly Christian yet marginally Jewish, resulting at times in a skewed image of valiant settlers facing roaming "terrorists," the bulk of whom are Muslims. So, lamentably, the identification of "Muslim" with "fanatic" and even "terrorist" pervades our subliminal awareness. And then there is the bugbear of "fundamentalism," a term which Catholics generally employ to castigate anyone else, allowing the phrase "Muslim fundamentalist" to roll off our lips without much reflection. Finally, the direct and massive involvement of an international coalition led by the United States in a war against one Arab state for the purported defense of others in the region only adds to the urgency of calls for a clearer and more realistic grasp of Islam.

In the face of all these obstacles, how can one start to teach about, to learn about Islam? By beginning with their revelational book, the Holy Qur'an, certainly. But it will probably help little to take a copy out of the library and begin to be inspired. We might feel a bit like the Hindu traveler in the United States who took advantage of the hotel room Bible to acquaint himself with this country's holy book, only to realize that it had very little "religion" in it! For one thing, the arrangement of the chapters or *suras* in the Muslim holy book can be daunting, for after the first (which serves them as a frequent prayer, much like the Our Father for Christians) the rest follow in a conventional order based solely on their length. (This is likewise the principle for the ordering of Paul's epistles in the New Testament.) So whoever ventures forward into the second sura which is the longest and incidentally one of the last to be revealed, may find themselves bogged down in material which seems strange, oblique, and repetitious even though it resonates with a majesty of its own. For this reason, some translators have sought to reorder the suras such as Penguin's *The Koran* by N.J. Dahood which arranges them out in a conjectured chronological sequence. While such a recasting is not the sort of thing which Muslims wish to countenance, the Qur'an itself does indicate where each sura was revealed to Muhammad, for it is part of their belief that the Prophet received God's message piecemeal, as it were, in response to specific situations.

Since it is received as God's very word, Christians are better advised to liken the Qur'an to Jesus himself (as *the* Word of God) rather than to the Bible, where God's word is understood to be mediated through the concerns of the inspired authors. So when citing a verse of the Qur'an, it is advisable to say: "the Qur'an says ...," and never "Muhammad says ...," for the Prophet is but God's mouthpiece. The sayings of Muhammad himself, on the other hand, have been collected into a series of narratives, admonitions, and aphorisms known as *hadith*, which also instruct Muslims. One often finds that they refer to these as guides to action. The Qur'an itself, in all or in part, is frequently committed to memory, and favorite verses are employed, much like the Jesus-prayer in Orthodox spirituality, as mantras evoking the presence of God.

As God's very word made Arabic, translations of the Qur'an are explicitly not the Qur'an itself. Sometimes this distinction is encoded in the title such as A. J. Arberry's *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford, 1964), M.M. Pickthall's *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New American Library, 1953), or Ahmed Ali's *Al-Qur'an: A Commentary Translation* (Princeton, 1988). Fortunately for Christian readers, the retired Anglican bishop of Jerusalem, Kenneth Cragg, has recently translated the Qur'an and collected its key verses thematically in an edition which provides helpful reading tips: *Readings in the Qur'an* (Collins, 1988). For those desiring a more systematic immersion into these scriptures there is probably no better brief guide available than W. Montgomery Watt's revision of Richard Bell's extraordinary *Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh University Press, 1970).

As with Christianity, the history of the movement known as Islam may afford one a better understanding than the revelational book itself. Here readers can profit from a century of Western academic scholarship, initially European yet currently American

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as well. Among the most readable general introductions are Frederick Denny's *An Introduction to Islam* (Macmillan, 1985) and Jacques Jomier's *How to Understand Islam* (SCM, 1989). Denny is a student of comparative religions whose understanding of Islam extends as far as Indonesia, whereas Jomier is a French Dominican who has spent much of his life in Cairo and the farther reaches of Africa. Each writes clearly, Denny emitting the air of a textbook, while Jomier's style displays the learned continental flair of *haute vulgarisation*. Each orients his presentation in ways that make connections with Christian ideas and practice while both are also aware that the identification of "Muslim" with "Arab" must be overcome—for the majority of today's Muslims live outside Arab lands. Hardier readers may profit from Andras and Ruth Hamori's edition of the Hungarian-German scholar Ignaz Goldziher's classical *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton, 1981) where the similarities and differences between Islam and Judaism receive more attention, and the developments in spiritual life under the Sufis is nicely presented.

A masterful introduction covering this same range of basic material but from within the tradition itself can be found in the late Fuzlur Rahman's *Islam* (Second edition, University of Chicago, 1979). This work continues to serve as a *vade mecum* for intellectually inclined novices as well as a brilliant interpretative essay for veterans, Muslim and non-Muslims alike. Its author received a traditional Islamic education in his native Punjab before going on to complete doctoral studies at Oxford. He began his career in the early 1950s closely associated with the heady idealistic effort to forge a modern Muslim state in Pakistan. Later retreating from what evolved into a political vortex, he concentrated on a formidable array of scholarly pursuits, ultimately at the University of Chicago. His remarkable learning and generosity of spirit live on in his extensive writings as well as an exceptional group of appreciative former students spread out amid dozens of university faculties in the Muslim world and the West.

Become a Commonweal Associate

Another avenue of approach to these origins lies in the search for its historical founder which in the case of Islam is far better documented than for Christianity, although the inevitable glosses and mythologizing accretions are hardly lacking. Here two easily accessible works might aid a beginner. Tor Andrae's *Mohammed: The Man and His Faith* (Harper, 1960) offers a streamlined and sensitive capsule portrait that evidences the best virtues of old-fashioned Germanic scholarship, though the author was actually Swedish. A biography that is probably more in tune with contemporary sensibility, better informed regarding the socio-cultural context, and incorporates later findings is *Mohammed* (Vintage, 1974) by Maxine Rodinson, doyen of Semitic studies in France and still one of her most insightful observers of related current affairs.

An exploration of the Sufi movement—a heartfelt response to God's presence in the Qur'an on the part of many Muslims over the ages—might start with Annemarie Schimmel's beautifully written *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (University of North Carolina Press, 1975). Or for bolder souls who prefer to nestle immediately at the sheikh's feet, the just-published magisterial tome of William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (SUNY Press, 1989) will provide an aspiring contemplative with the closest thing to a magic carpet which is, of course, a folkloric transmutation of the Muslim prayer rug. Chittick's eloquent translation plus facing commentary of extensive portions of the works by this thirteenth-century Andalusian mystic, perhaps Islam's most influential and controversial spiritual master, offers lay and professional readers alike an unprecedented resource for the study of this genius, comparable to John of the Cross as poet and Meister Eckhart as thinker. Taken as a group, these works can introduce us to Islam and to the life and practice of our Muslim brothers and sisters in a way which is at once sympathetic and illuminating.

Passing from these canonical, devotional, and theoretical concerns to the more actual side of Islam with its cacophonous expressions in our times, a sound acquaintance with recent historical experience in the region stands as the requisite preliminary for any serious inquiry. Just as the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution, or for that matter, Vatican II, are impossible to understand without a knowledge of medieval Caesaro-Papism, an adequate grasp of today's headlines from the Middle East demands an awareness of the events and attitudes that have lately shaped the course of these lands.

Hence a survey such as John O. Voll's excellent *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Westview Press, 1982) or Edward Mortimer's slightly more journalistic *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam* (Vintage, 1982) can serve to initiate the newcomer into the complex cross-currents of revival, reform, accommodation, and resistance that have marked the transformation of the declining Ottoman Imperium into the present assortment of secular nation states whose regimes are variously and often ambiguously allied with religion. A smaller volume expounding a sociology-of-religion viewpoint with an emphasis on the most tumultuous cases is Henry Munson's *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East* (Yale, 1988). Meanwhile, for those preferring a comparative politics approach, Tamara Sonn offers a solid foundation of contemporary efforts to address the intricate overlap of the sacred and the secular in the struggle over defining authority and establishing order in her new study entitled *Between Qur'an and Crown: The Challenge of Political Legitimacy in the Arab World* (Westview, 1990).

Of course, innumerable works of many sorts, including memoirs, biographies, ethnographies, and all manner of histories abound to complement these overviews, but perhaps one recent volume of exceptional interest can be singled out. *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (Simon & Schuster, 1985) by Roy Mottahedeh, presently head of Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, is widely recognized as a rare achievement combining impressive erudition with a vivid narrative to portray the

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sometimes arcane culture of Shi'ite religious learning and the tensions within it that eventually burst upon the world stage with the establishment of the Ayatollah's Islamic Republic.

Clearly, the manifold forces and counterforces that presently enliven Muslim societies far surpass the scholarly paradigms available for their assessment, East and West. Or, as religious studies professor Marilyn Waldman modestly put it a few years ago, researchers have yet to "develop a framework commensurate with the magnitude of contemporary Islam." Hence it is not surprising that much of the most insightful current scholarship is appearing in shorter pieces in the form of articles rather than books. But length should never be confused with authoritativeness. For example, one resource of great usefulness is the landmark *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Macmillan, 1987) which contains scores of relevant entries scattered about under numerous titles but concentrated in volume seven ("Icon to Jensen") where articles such as "Islam: An Overview," "Islamic Law," and even "Islam in the Americas" provide as informed and current a handbook account for such topics as is available in any language.

Two further titles in this anthology format may be singled out as representative of a constant flow of uneven festschrifts, published papers from academic conferences and special journal issues. First, *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions Since 1500*, edited by N. Keddie, (University of California Press, 1972) is a stellar collection focusing on key regions, axial periods, and seminal issues. Interestingly, its composition slightly predates the explosion of interest and the consequent reappraisals in many quarters that have accompanied the so-called resurgence of Islam. But the substance and quality of its contents is such that their relevance is only heightened by what many observers have perceived to be utterly unanticipated developments. Moreover, the articles are also quite untinged with the possibly distorting tones of retrospective views stimulated by crisis-consciousness. Meanwhile, *The Islamic Impulse*, edited by Barbara Stowasser (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1987) competently fills this gap which has been produced by the rise of seemingly newer manifestations of religiously inspired activism. It consists of a score of relatively short essays, including case studies dealing with both the popular and the elite levels, ideological and theological analyses, and several insider expositions that chart the main currents of ongoing controversies and conflicts particularly in the Arab world.

Finally, at least one token of a related genre deserves mention in virtue of the growing urgency of genuine ecumenism between ourselves and our Muslim neighbors. Kenneth Cragg's *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response* (Orbis Books, 1984) frames an exceptionally clear and theologically sophisticated discussion of how Christian faith may be articulated, shared, and enriched by an encounter with Islam. The rarity, no less than the timeliness, of a work of this caliber is perhaps a sign that this long overdue global agenda of mutual recognition is dawning at last.

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The sacred necessity

MODERNITY ON ENDLESS TRIAL
Leszek Kolakowski
University of Chicago, $25.95, 261 pp.

Diogenes Allen

This is a collection of twenty-four essays and addresses, ten published here in English for the first time, by the eminent Polish philosopher, Leszek Kolakowski, who was expelled from the Communist party in 1966, and who now divides his time between All Souls College, Oxford, and the University of Chicago.

Although the material in the collection is quite diverse, the essays are deeply connected. All of them in one way or the other are reflections on the ambiguities of our cultural heritage, the secular humanism of the Enlightenment and Christianity. Kolakowski is generally far more critical toward secular humanism than toward Christianity; in fact, it is not too much to say that he gives a kind of apologetic for Christianity. He frequently points out that the modern world is deeply indebted to Christianity for many of its greatest achievements. The restraining and inspiring influence of Christian faith is needed today to restore a tolerable balance between two competitive tendencies in Western culture: the tendency to make claims to final and ultimate truth, and a critical attitude that so undermines all claims to truth that we tend toward skepticism, relativism, and nihilism. It is from the destructive effect of these two competitive tendencies that the book takes its title: *Modernity on Endless Trial.*

In the essay, "The Revenge of the Sacred in the Secular Culture," he argues that when a culture loses all sense of limits, it is open to every form of intellectual and political totalitarianism. Having thrown off the limits imposed by religion in the name of autonomy and utopian hopes of perfectibility, modern society's repeated failures lead to disillusionment. The idea that society is in principle "an endlessly flexible thing" sanctions force and violence and finally despotism and the destruction of culture. The seeds were sown with the rejection of the sacred and the reality of evil. We are restrained from the twin tendencies of our secular culture by religious faith. "Religion is man's way of accepting life as inevitable defeat....One can accept life, and accept it, at the same time, as a defeat only if one accepts that there is sense beyond that which is inherent in human history—if, in other words, one accepts the order of the sacred."

Kolakowski believes that central to secular Western culture is the conviction that human beings are to be regarded as ends in themselves, and never as means—that is, each one as an individual, not as a member of a nation, class, race, state, or civilization. Although Kolakowski uses Kantian language, he makes it clear that to regard each individual as irreplaceable and unexchangeable has Christianity as its ultimate source. The moral evaluations that run through the collection—whether they be on the dilemmas of the Christian legacy, the politics of Western democracy and Marxism, or the pretensions of the social sciences—have as their touchstone the Christian humanistic conviction concerning the dignity of human beings and their limitations.

One of our limitations is our intellects. Kolakowski points out that intellectuals can analyze the desperate condition of Western society which is losing confidence in the value of its own heritage. They can even show the value and need of the Christian religion. But what is needed is faith, and "to spread faith, faith is needed and not intellectual assertion of the social utility of faith." So even though he argues that, in spite of many assertions to the contrary, Christianity is intellectually viable (see the essay, "On the So-

After centuries of the growth of the Enlightenment, we suddenly wake up in a mental and cultural disarray; we are more and more frightened in the face of a world that is losing its religious legacy, and our fear is well justified. The lost myths seem to be replaced less by enlightened rationality and more by terrifying secular caricatures or substitutes. We notice with a kind of relief various symptoms of religious renaissance, and the "return of the sacred" has become a fashionable topic. And yet we—and by we I mean philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, or historians—cannot contribute to this process; we can describe it—with hope or with dread—but we are not priests, and only through priesthood, prophecy, and acts of living faith can human participation in the sacred be maintained or reinforced. Intellectuals are helpless, and least of all can they contribute to the vitality of myth by explaining that myths are indispensable for such or another cultural, moral, psychological, or social reason. And the attempt to endear oneself to the rationalists' ideology by "demythologizing" Christianity is the least reliable prescription.

—Leszek Kolakowski
Modernity on Endless Trial

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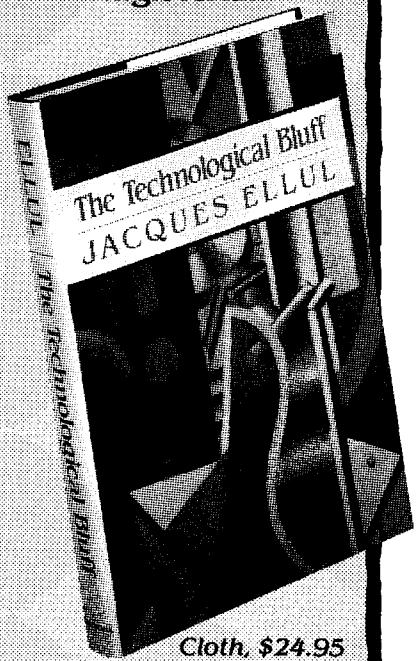

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Called Crisis of Christianity"), he looks to those who have faith to reinspire Western culture.

Most of the essays are fairly easy to read and sparkle with wit. The most humorous is a satire titled, "The Emperor Kennedy Legend." It purports to report a meeting of an Academy of Science many centuries after "the Great Calamity" (nuclear war). Supposedly only eight books have survived the calamity. Among them is one titled *Creative Gardening*. As you can imagine, Kolakowski has great fun presenting the absurdities of Structuralist, Freudian, and Marxist anthropological efforts to explain on the basis of such material the Kennedy era.

Kolakowski is a person who has become wise. He seeks to help us become more wise in an age that is increasingly given over to a concern with means, because it has lost faith in its temporal ends. He hopes to help us recognize the dependence of the temporal on the eternal. □

CONSENTING TO CONVERSION

CHRISTIAN BELIEF IN A POSTMODERN WORLD
Diogenes Allen
Westminster/John Knox, $15.95, 238 pp.

QUEST
The Search for Meaning Through Christ
Diogenes Allen
Walker, $14.95, 119 pp.

Robert P. Imbelli

Diogenes Allen, Presbyterian minister, professor of philosophy at Princeton Theological Seminary, and author of eleven books, is not well-known to Catholic readers. He very much deserves to be. For the project he has been pursuing over the past twenty years is, in my estimation, a uniquely important one: nothing less than a contemporary restatement of St. Bonaventure's spiritual classic, *The Journey of the Mind to God.*

Very much like Bonaventure, Allen's project unites mind and heart, the intellectual and the affective. His passion is for both philosophy and spirituality. And his "authorities" are those who have similarly united the speculative and the practical: Plato at the very origin of the West's philosophical tradition; Pascal challenging an age of increasingly and harmfully one-sided rationalism; Simone Weil and Austin Farrer amidst the upheavals and horrors of our own century. From this dialogue with the philosophical-religious tradition Allen fashions a statement at once rigorous and heartfelt, austere and concrete. His writing manifests the clarity and disciplined intensity of his favorite poet: the Anglican priest, George Herbert.

Christian Belief in a Postmodern World is Allen's most comprehensive work to date. It displays a rich and cumulative argument in an outwardly simple and straightforward guise. The three parts of the book are titled: "The Book of Nature," "The Book of Scripture," and "Christianity and Other Faiths." Allen contends that "the end of the modern world" affords new possibilities for exhibiting the intellectual strength of the Christian faith, thus allowing believers to affirm their faith with "the full wealth of conviction." His enterprise, therefore, might be termed "apologetics"; but an apologetics addressed as much to those within as to those outside the household of faith.

Allen's is an apologetics in the classical sense of reasoned discourse recommending the truth of the faith. He thus seeks to steer a very Catholic course between a fideism that speaks indiscriminately of "the leap of faith," making faith appear willful and arbitrary, and a rationalism that evacuates faith of its distinctive substance. Faith is reasonable and is patient of our best intellectual efforts; faith moves beyond reason, for it requires a willingness to be changed: to consent to God's call to conversion.

I have underlined the classical and,

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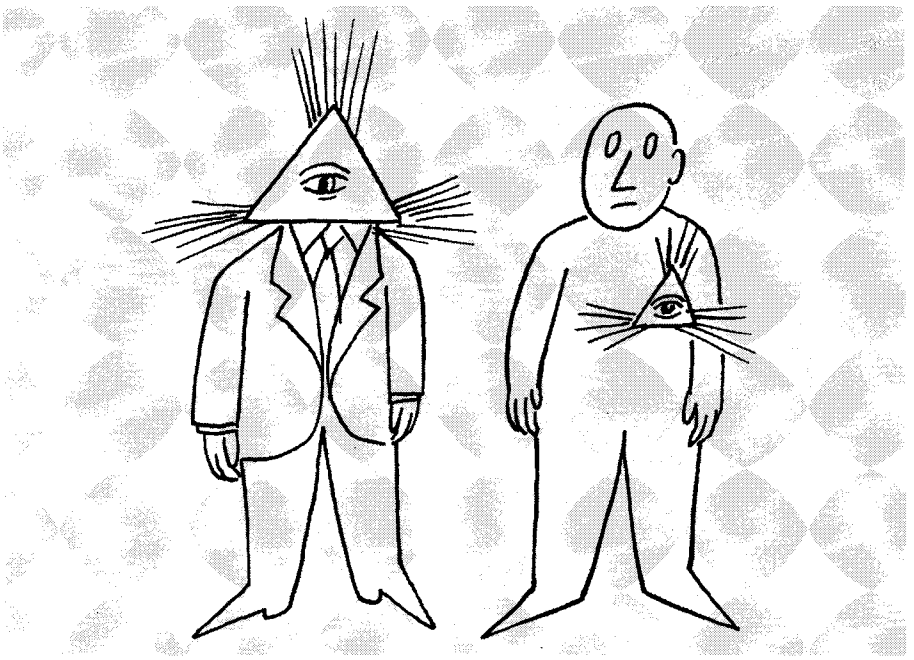

indeed, Bonaventure-like character of Allen's project. But the key in which it is composed is a consciously postmodern one. His contention is that developments in both science and philosophy conspire to break through the barriers that the reductive rationalism of modernity erected against an intellectual affirmation of Christian faith "with full conviction." Part One of the book shows with care and precision that the much misconstrued "warfare" between science and religious belief no longer holds the field. Rather, contemporary physics itself gives solid intellectual grounds for affirming the existence of God as real *possibility*. In doing so, it also helps to undermine the philosophical barricades of Hume and Kant that had long cast a spell of skepticism and agnosticism over any effort at philosophical theology.

Having found in the book of nature pointers to God's existence (Bonaventure's *vestigia*), Allen then consults the book of Scripture, the privileged witness to God's providential purposes, for signs of God's intentions. In so doing we move from Pascal's "order of the intellect" to his "order of the heart" which has its own logic and exigencies. Foremost among these exigencies is the willingness to be changed. The following sentence represents a central motif of all Allen's work: "We must be changed in order to receive the good God intends us to have." However important thinking and reflection are to faith, believers are called to action: to interaction with God, to reconciliation with neighbor, to doing justice for all. And the paradigm for the believer's action is God's own action in Christ who is God's new creation, making possible a new, supernatural life of forgiveness and self-giving generosity.

Like Bonaventure, Allen's work is pervasively Christocentric. In Christ God's fullness is made flesh. But, borrowing from the insights of Simone Weil, he locates the distinctive focus of Christian revelation in the crucifixion. For here the self-renunciation of God, that makes creation itself possible, inaugurates the new creation, the establishment of perfect justice before God and among humans.

Again, however, this Christocentricity assumes a postmodern guise. For Part Three of *Christian Belief* initiates a dialogue between distinctive Christian faith and the world religions; not in the neutral mode of philosophy of religion, but in the theological mode of "A Christian Theology of Other Faiths." Here the distinctive Christian conviction about the crucifixion of God's Incarnate Word provides the key perspective, making possible a genuine appreciation for the revelatory capacity of non-Christian religious traditions, as well as a respectful case for their recapitulation in Christ.

Part of Allen's special gift, as I have indicated, is his capacity to unite the reflective and the practical. However,

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some of his books may more readily be catalogued as "spirituality": the concrete depiction of the actual living of Christian faith. *Quest: The Search for Meaning Through Christ* represents his latest effort in this genre. Read in tandem with *Christian Belief*, it illustrates how one might, after critical investigation, re-read the gospel story with a second naiveté that speaks anew to the heart.

In *Quest*, Allen employs a mode of communication that is less overtly philosophical and abstract, more explicitly narrative and imaginative. He addresses concretely the classical issues of spirituality: how to realize in our lives the presence of God; what are the obstacles that impede and practices that foster renewal in the image of Christ? It is, blessedly, a spirituality given substance by its reflective underpinnings and rendered unsentimental by its sense (stemming, perhaps, from its author's Presbyterian tradition) that the human need is acute and that true salvation is won only at tremendous cost. "The journey is quite lengthy," he states simply, "because we need to be reshaped in so many ways to conform to the likeness of God in Christ."

If I read Allen correctly, he is not unwilling to speak of *experience* of God or Christ. Indeed, direct encounter (he speaks of "contact") with Christ seems required for mature Christian faith, lived with the full wealth of conviction. Nonetheless, he has a sharp eye for discerning how much of the contemporary appeal to "experience" is distorted by a narcissism that revels in the superficial "feelings" of an ego that resists transformation. This is exacerbated in a consumerist society that sells "experience" as one more marketable commodity.

Authentic encounter with God through Christ results in a liberation and transfiguration of the self that is not attainable without suffering. Contact with Christ cannot bypass the cross. For, though it is the risen Lord whom we encounter, he always bears in his body the marks of his Passion. In a time when much "spirituality" either focuses on the public ministry of Jesus as warrant for a liberationist agenda or on a gnostic savior-figure as validation for the most disparate life-options, Allen joins Jesus and the Christ by the infrangible bond of the cross. All God's grace in creation and redemption is cruciform.

Those pursuing the journey of the mind and heart to God in late twentieth-century America will find in the work of Diogenes Allen wonderfully illuminating guidance for the quest.

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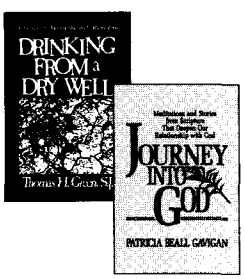

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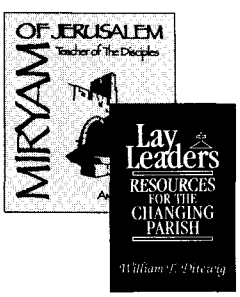

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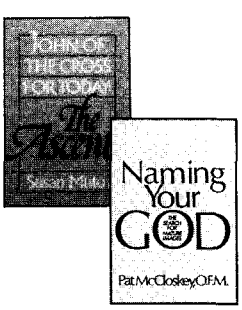

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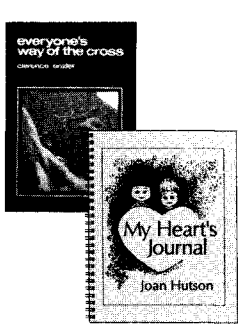

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REVIEWERS

DIOGENES ALLEN *is Stuart Professor of Philosophy at the Princeton Theological Seminary.*

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The great household of faith

Lawrence S. Cunningham

My shelves groan with histories of Christianity, including some that include a good deal of visual art and illustrations (e.g., Geoffrey Barraclough's *The World of Christianity*, Bamber Gascoigne's *The Christians*; just to name two British publications); but none quite reach the high standards of literacy and visual production found in the new *Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*. Full historical essays of the unfolding story of Christianity by some of the more eminent names in English ecclesiastical history (there are two Americans among the contributors: Martin Marty writing on North America; Frederick Pike on Latin America) are married to profuse illustrations that include both examples of "fine art" and the crafts like calligraphy, textiles, and ivory carving in such a way that one can read or browse with equal pleasure. I have done both and with much instruction. A final section of the book gives us some summing up with an especially cogent article by Maurice Wiles on "What Christians Believe" and three final articles on changing forms of Christian community (by the sociologist of religion, Bryan Wilson); the Christian conscience; and the future of Christianity. The historical essays are briskly written, authoritative in tone, and eminently readable. The art is selected with sensitivity and is authentically illustrative.

The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity, *edited by John McManners, Oxford University Press, $45, 724 pp.*

My general praise for this volume, however, must be tempered a bit. I judge it to be a handsome book but there are some limitations. The historical perspective of the essays is very traditional in its general orientation. The Syriac and Armenian churches are mentioned, for example, only with reference to their relationship to Christological heresies. Nothing is said of their rich liturgical and literary tradition. The most conspicuous imbalance, however, devolves around the role of women in the story. There are no female church historians/theologians among the contributors. I note that not to plea for equal opportunity but to explain why—to cite a few elementary examples—one does not find figures like Catherine of Siena or Julian of Norwich or Hildegard of Bingen or Clare of Assisi in the general index of the volume while basic nonentities like Jimmy Swaggart and Jerry Falwell merit two references each. The fact that the status of women in the church does get discussed in various places in the text does not absolve the authors from presenting a more balanced, less exclusively masculine, focus for their entire story. That will not do and even the Dons of Oxbridge should know that by now.

Hans Küng, not conspicuous for shyness or modesty, decided to mark the tenth anniversary of the Vatican's removal of his mandate as a Catholic professor of theology by publishing this florilegium of collected essays, addresses, and broadsides on church renewal. Some of the pieces in this work go back twenty years; all of them tread well-worn paths: Küng's criticism of papal pretensions; laments over the entropy afflicting church reform and ecumenical outreach; indignation over institutional suppression/manipulation in the church at large and in Germany in particular.

None of the essays anthologized here amounts to much in the way of sustained theological analysis; much of it is done in the long familiar style of Küng-as-scourge-gadfly-prophet, i.e., lots of short sentences studded with exclamation points. A few chapters of this sort, admittedly, have a certain rhetorical punch but the book as a whole is, to use the pungent Yiddish word, a long *kvetch*. Enough already.

Reforming the Church Today, *by Hans Küng, Crossroad, $18.95, 195 pp.*

Histories of universities are most often read by dutiful alumni, professional historians, and incurable insomniacs. Nuesse's story of The Catholic University, however, can lay claim to a larger audience if for no other reason than the important role that CUA has played in the modern history of Catholicism in this country. First conceived as a graduate institution for clerics, its tortuous history finally embraced both undergraduate and graduate education for clergy, religious, and laity. It can make a fair case as having been a shaping force in the American church (a generation ago, it could number nearly a third of the episcopate among its alumni, as well as a large percentage of diocesan curial staffs) but it never realized its dream of being the flagship of American Catholic higher education despite its honor roll of distinguished professors.

The reasons for that failure are gently

LAWRENCE S. CUNNINGHAM *teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame.*

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laid out by the author who is himself a graduate, a veteran faculty member, and administrator of the university itself. The first flaw must be laid at the feet of the American hierarchy who never quite understood what higher education was all about but did not feel that such ignorance should stop them from energetic meddling in, as well as active resistance toward, the attempts of the university's most visionary faculty to create an American equivalent, say, to Louvain. When Nuesse writes that the sponsors (i.e., the bishops) did not support the institution in 1899 with full enthusiasm he might have just as well been writing about 1990. Secondly, the ponderous hand of Rome rested heavily on the administrative and academic programs. The recent *Affaire Curran* has analogues that run back to the beginning of the century with clerics harried from their posts, reputations besmirched, and elementary norms of justice ignored with insouciant arrogance.

Nuesse's story, blessedly, counterbalances this lugubrious history with sharply etched portraits of distinguished scholars who gave luster to an otherwise badly funded and often beleaguered institution. He traces out the entwined history of CUA and the building of that massive monument of bad taste, the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Quite correctly, he notes that the development of the two editions of the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, the sponsorship of some distinguished learned journals, the patristic editions published under the editorship of the late Johannes Quasten, and other monuments of scholarship point to what CUA might have been.

The Catholic University of America: A Centennial History, *by C. Joseph Nuesse, The Catholic University of America Press, $19.95, 508 pp.*

Nuesse plainly loves his alma mater but his story, in fact, is a bittersweet tale whose underlying moral is that the failure of CUA to attain a greatness proportionate to the vigor of the North American church is a continuing reproach to the hierarchy of the most powerful church in modern times.

Truth in advertising demands that I acknowledge that Jean Porter is a colleague, but that relationship, I trust, does not preclude high praise for her stimulating book on Aquinas and ethics. Her opening and closing chapters set the parameters of her task. She begins with a survey of contemporary Christian ethics in order to indicate the fragmentation of the field whose major shards would include the return to nature as a source for ethical reflection (Gustafson); the believing community as the locus for Christian ethics (Hauerwas); the agapaic ethics of Outka; and the raging debate among Catholics over absolute and/or proportional ethical norms. These shards do not add up to a mosaic, and that fact alone impels Porter to attempt a rapprochement through the agency of the one person all the above ethicists read: Thomas Aquinas. In fact, it is one of the small

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ironies of our age that Thomas should be seen as an ecumenical bridge in Christian ethical discourse.

Porter's final chapter advances the conviction that Thomas Aquinas might well provide a paradigm for the recovery of a foundational ethics since, as she rightly notes, there has been a keen interest in Thomas in Protestant circles and, further, because there is a rationality in his thinking that might give us clues as to how to tackle some of the more resistant conundrums of contemporary ethical debate.

The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics, *by Jean Porter, Westminster/John Knox, $24.95, 208 pp.*

Sandwiched between those chapters is the main bulk of the work which closely reads the *Summa* in order to construct Thomas's ethical theory as it rests on his notion of Goodness and his understanding of the virtues. This kind of close *explication du texte* can be formidable for the uninitiated but Porter is blessed with a gift for clear prose, keeping an eye on the topic at hand and a sense of how Aquinas must be seen in the light both of his limitations (e.g., his faulty psychology; his static cosmology; etc.) and his possibilities for contemporary discourse. She has some fine pages on how one can read Aquinas without accepting his worldview; indeed, one of the burdens of this study is to show that the very problems that contemporary science raises for ethics (a point emphasized by James Gustafson with whom this book seems in dialogue) can best be addressed by starting from the Thomistic conviction that a natural theology need not be a priori ruled out of court.

My suspicion is that this book will provoke much discussion in religious ethics but its reading should not be limited to those discussants alone. The larger value of this book rests in its ability to retrieve a classic in such a manner that it sheds light on the contemporary moment. Like the good householder of the gospel, Porter brings forth both old things and new.

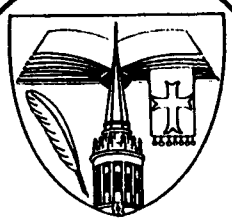
Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) is a titanic, if somewhat unclassifiable, figure in contemporary Catholic theology. In the last year of his long and enormously productive life, he contributed a series of meditations on the articles of the creed for some German pastoral magazines. This volume is an assemblage of those short essays which were finished just before he died.

Those acquainted with von Balthasar will recognize his style in these short (and, in places, almost gnomic) reflections: an unremittingly "high" view of theology which reflects his long engagement with the Greek Fathers; a theology conceived in Trinitarian terms; a steady focus on the Scriptures conceived as a revelation; and a resistance to any attempt to lessen the data of the tradition. As always, there are stunning insights in his writing, often expressed paradoxically: his notion that the Second Person of the Trinity has greater claim to femininity than the Holy Spirit; his observation that since God made us "male and female" indicates male/female primal potentialities in God albeit not in any reductionist sexual sense; etc. On the other hand, there is in von Balthasar a kind of abstractionism that keeps him at some distance from the historical grittiness of Christianity along with a mystical lyricism in his writing that cloys after a bit.

Credo: Meditations on the Apostles Creed, *by Hans Urs von Balthasar, Crossroad, $11.95, 105 pp.*

Who might read this little book? It is obviously too brief to be a fair introduction to his thought (*The von Balthasar Reader*, Crossroad, might serve here), but for the seeker of solid spiritual fare or as a gift for someone who has "received the creed" as part of the conversion process of RCIA, this would prove to be a challenging little book to encounter. What von Balthasar excels at is his capacity to keep alive the old tradition of monastic theology in which the theologian is thought to be one who speaks of God out of deep contemplative experience; that is a tradition not lightly to be discarded.

Francis de Sales (1567-1622) was one of the most attractive of the major figures



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RELIGIOUS BOOKNOTES

Francis de Sales: Sage and Saint, *by Andre Ravier, S.J., Ignatius, $11.95, 269 pp.*

Borromeo in Italy to Saint Vincent de Paul, Pierre de Berulle, and Mother Angelique (of Port Royal fame) in France. His friendship with Madame de Chantal (co-founder, with de Sales, of the Visitandine nuns) is one of the great stories of spiritual friendship in the church. What is most attractive about de Sales was his expansive spirituality aimed, not at a spiritual elite, but at everyone who wished to love God; a spirituality encapsulated in his two classic works *An Introduction to the Devout Life* and his *Treatise on the Love of God.*

Part of the generosity of his spiritual vision is due to the fact that de Sales struggled both as a scholar and as a spiritual seeker to overcome his own incipient despair over the inhuman logic of the predestination struggles unleashed by the Calvinist tradition and continued in the Catholic church in the ferocious battles between the Jesuits and Dominicans over the relationship of grace and free will. De Sales, in fact, played a large part in the papal settlement of that struggle.

Reading Ravier's biography of the saint reminded me of how sensible de Sales, given his age and culture, was with his conviction that religious differences are best solved by loving dialogue; with his belief that education is crucial for the well-being of the church (he once said that an ignorant priest is worse than a malicious priest); and his own synthesis of humanism and mystical spirituality. Francis de Sales knew the Franciscan tradition, was a devotee of the *Spiritual Exercises*, and through his links to the Acarie circle in Paris, was conversant with the apophatic spirituality of the Rhineland mystics.

Ravier's biography makes me wish to read a fuller study of the saint which would be less hagiographically breathless (the fault may be with the translator here, at least in part) and more fully documented (the few notes provided are more a puzzle than a help). Jane de Chantal, for example, never comes to life in this work and the untutored reader would not know that the volume *Francis de Sales/Jane de Chantal: Letters of Spiritual Direction* (Paulist, 1988) would make a companion piece to this biography. Ravier's study whets the appetite but, for this reviewer, does not quite set out a full meal.

My mind's image of the El Salvador martyrs is of anonymous bodies, face down on a lawn with their heads blown apart. That image, horrific enough, has now been enlarged by this hastily assembled but sympathetic homage to the six Jesuits and the two peasant laywomen slaughtered by members of the U.S.-trained army battalion in El Salvador. The priests ranged in age from

Companions of Jesus: The Jesuit Matyrs of El Salvador, *by Jon Sobrino et. al., Orbis, $12.95, 185 pp.*

a cancer-stricken elderly worker in peasant education to a Chicago-trained psychologist who was in his late forties. They were all connected to the Jesuit university in El Salvador (Ignacio Ellacuria was its rector) but they were hardly ivory tower intellectuals. Their short biographies indicate that all of them spent their weekends as pastoral workers among the rural and urban poor celebrating the liturgy, managing clinics, and building small chapels. They embodied, it seems at least from this safe haven of Notre Dame, to perfection the Jesuit charism to be contemplatives in action.

Jon Sobrino's long introduction gives us both a context for understanding their work and a framework for seeing how they conceived of their task in the triple terms of their commitment to El Salvador, their vocations as priests, and their lives as Jesuits. That Sobrino was able to write this essay is due to his absence from El Salvador when the murders took place; otherwise it would have been left to someone else to eulogize

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him along with his six companions.

Nor should we forget the two women, a mother and daughter, who died. Let them stand for the seventy thousand who have been killed in that unhappy country. They fit the bill: peasants who fled the violence of the countryside for the safe haven of the city. They had the bad luck to have moved to the priests' residence that night because their house on the edge of the campus seemed too close to the fighting between the guerrillas and the military.

Companions of Jesus serves three useful functions: it personalizes people who, for most of us, were simply more sad numbers in the slaughter in Central America; it tells us something of the story behind their killing; and, most importantly, it reminds us that martyrs are not long dead hieratic figures devoured by lions and enshrined in stained glass windows. They are contemporary men and women shot down with M16 assault rifles supplied by our own government. This book is not hagiography; it is a cautionary tale.

Robert Coles is one of my favorite writers both because he loves and writes about some of my favorite people (Flannery O'Connor, Simone Weil, George Orwell, William Carlos Williams, Dorothy Day, Walker Percy, etc.) and because of the largesse and sympathy of his research. This book is the sixth volume of his series on children and it is one that should engage the attention of every sensitive parent and must be read by anyone who works in religious education.

The Spiritual Life of Children, *by Robert Coles, Houghton Mifflin, $22.95, 358 pp.*

Based on extensive interviews conducted by himself and his sons in a number of countries, Coles, who is psychoanalytically trained himself, eschews the old Freudian dogma that religious belief is simply a projection of need and/or a coping mechanism for fear. Interestingly enough, his concern with children's religious discourse was encouraged by the master's daughter, Anna Freud, herself a distingushed child analyst. Coles has spoken with, taped, and collected the drawings of children whose background cuts across both class and religion. We have recounted here the reflections of Native Americans, every stripe of Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

What comes across most powerfully in these stories is that while children operate on what Paul Ricoeur would call the "first level of naïveté" (e.g., God is "up there" and "sits on a throne," etc.), their understanding of that level of imagination carries with it a level of questioning, skepticism, and a capacity for reflection that becomes

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available to a sympathetic and sophisticated listener like Coles. His own conclusion is that the eternal questions of who we are, where we come from, and where we are headed are asked by children "more unremittingly, more intensely, and more subtly than we sometimes imagine." They are, in short, theologians if we understand by theology the process by which faith seeks understanding. At the head of this review I suggested it to the attention of parents and religious educators; to that list I would also like to add professional theologians. □

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 146)

for myself, I am vice-president of Planned Parenthood of Central and Northern Arizona and chair of its Religious Affairs Council. I commend *Commonweal*, also, for publishing this article which dealt so sensitively with the controversial issue of abortion.

Though I am personally prochoice, and my denomination (United Church of Christ) at a General Synod level has consistently supported that position, I agree with Callahan that we need to take seriously the moral dimensions of choice. Without repeating them here (though they bear repeating), I support Callahan's four conditions regarding abortion whereby we would combine legal freedom and moral seriousness. I intend to circulate his article among my prochoice and prolife friends in the hope we can begin a dialogue that will lead to a meaningful compromise and accommodation on this subject.

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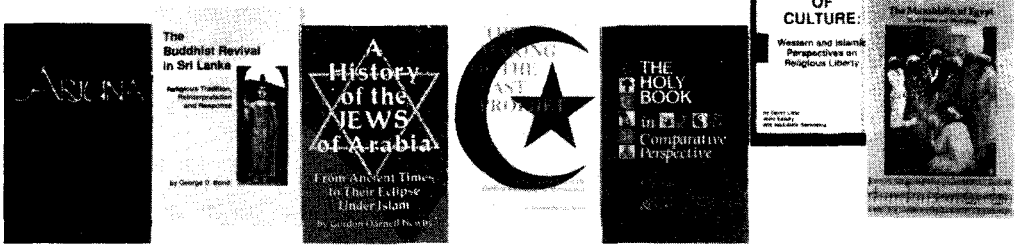
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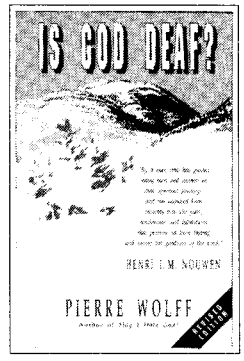

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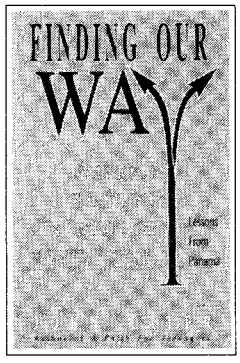

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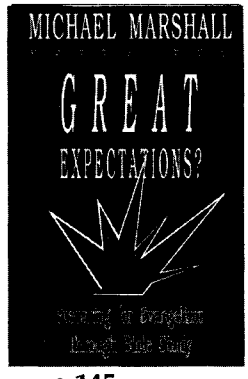

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